

35d

5

THE
W O R K S
O F
SOAME JENYNS, Esq.

V O L. IV.

5

W O R L D

BOYD'S

VOLUME

THE
WORKS
OF
SOAME JENYNS, Esq.
IN FOUR VOLUMES.

INCLUDING SEVERAL PIECES
NEVER BEFORE PUBLISHED.

TO WHICH ARE PREFIXED,
SHORT SKETCHES OF THE HISTORY OF
THE AUTHOR'S FAMILY,
AND ALSO OF HIS LIFE;

By CHARLES NALSON COLE, Esq.

V O L. IV.

L O N D O N:
PRINTED FOR T. CADELL, IN THE STRAND.
M.DCC.XC.



A
V I E W
OF THE
INTERNAL EVIDENCE
OF THE
CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

Acts xxvi. 28.

VOL. IV.

B

6

A

V I E W, &c.

MOST of the writers, who have undertaken to prove the divine origin of the Christian Religion, have had recourse to arguments drawn from these three heads : the prophecies still extant in the Old Testament—the miracles recorded in the New—or, the internal evidence arising from that excellence, and those clear marks of supernatural interposition, which are so conspicuous in the religion itself. The two former have been sufficiently explained and enforced by the ablest pens ; but the last, which seems to carry with it the greatest degree of conviction, has never, I think, been considered with that attention, which it deserves.

I mean not here to depreciate the proofs arising from either prophecies, or miracles : they both have, or ought to have, their pro-

B 2

per

per weight ; prophecies are permanent miracles, whose authority is sufficiently confirmed by their completion, and are therefore solid proofs of the supernatural origin of a religion, whose truth they were intended to testify ; such are those to be found in various parts of the scriptures relative to the coming of the Messiah, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the unexampled state in which the Jews have ever since continued, all so circumstantially descriptive of the events, that they seem rather histories of past, than predictions of future transactions ; and whoever will seriously consider the immense distance of time between some of them and the events which they foretell, the uninterrupted chain by which they are connected for many thousand years, how exactly they correspond with those events, and how totally unapplicable they are to all others in the history of mankind ; I say, whoever considers these circumstances, he will scarcely be persuaded to believe that they can be the productions of preceding artifice, or posterior

rior application, or can entertain the least doubt of their being derived from supernatural inspiration.

The miracles recorded in the New Testament to have been performed by Christ and his Apostles, were certainly convincing proofs of their divine commission to those who saw them; and as they were seen by such numbers, and are as well attested, as other historical facts, and above all, as they were wrought on so great and so wonderful an occasion, they must still be admitted as evidence of no inconsiderable force; but, I think, they must now depend for much of their credibility on the truth of that religion, whose credibility they were at first intended to support. To prove therefore the truth of the Christian Religion, we should begin by shewing the internal marks of divinity, which are stamped upon it; because on this the credibility of the prophecies and miracles in a great measure depends: for if we have once reason to be convinced, that this religion is derived from a superna-

tural origin, prophecies and miracles will become so far from being incredible, that it will be highly probable, that a supernatural revelation should be foretold, and enforced by supernatural means.

What pure Christianity is, divested of all its ornaments, appendages, and corruption, I pretend not to say ; but what it is not, I will venture to affirm, which is, that it is not the offspring of fraud or fiction : such, on a superficial view, I know it must appear to every man of good sense, whose sense has been altogether employed on other subjects ; but if any one will give himself the trouble to examine it with accuracy and candor, he will plainly see, that however fraud and fiction may have grown up with it, yet it never could have been grafted on the same stock, nor planted by the same hand.

To ascertain the true system, and genuine doctrines of this religion, after the undecided controversies of above seventeen centuries, and to remove all the rubbish, which artifice and ignorance have been heaping upon it
during

during all that time, would indeed be an arduous task, which I shall by no means undertake ; but to shew, that it cannot possibly be derived from human wisdom, or human imposture, is a work, I think, attended with no great difficulty, and requiring no extraordinary abilities, and therefore I shall attempt that, and that alone, by stating, and then explaining the following plain and undeniable propositions.

First, That there is now extant a book intitled the New Testament.

Secondly, That from this book may be extracted a system of religion intirely new, both with regard to the object and the doctrines, not only infinitely superior to, but unlike every thing, which had ever before entered into the mind of man.

Thirdly, That from this book may likewise be collected a system of ethics, in which every moral precept founded on reason is carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection, than in any other of the wisest philosophers of preceding ages ; every moral pre-

cept founded on false principles is totally omitted, and many new precepts added peculiarly corresponding with the new object of this religion.

Lastly, That such a system of religion and morality could not possibly have been the work of any man, or set of men; much less of those obscure, ignorant, and illiterate persons, who actually did discover, and publish it to the world; and that therefore it must undoubtedly have been effected by the interposition of divine power, that is, that it must derive its origin from God.

PROPOSITION I.

VERY little need be said to establish my first proposition, which is singly this : That there is now extant a book intituled the New Testament ; that is, there is a collection of writings distinguished by that denomination, containing four historical accounts of the birth, life, actions, discourses, and death of an extraordinary person named Jesus Christ, who was born in the reign of Augustus Cæsar, preached a new religion throughout the country of Judæa, and was put to a cruel and ignominious death in the reign of Tiberius. Also one other historical account of the travels, transactions, and orations of some mean and illiterate men, known by the title of his apostles, whom he commissioned to propagate his religion after his death ; which he foretold them he must suffer in confirmation of its truth. To these are added several epistolary writings, addressed

addressed by these persons to their fellow-labourers in this work, or to the several churches or societies of Christians, which they had established in the several cities through which they had passed.

It would not be difficult to prove, that these books were written soon after those extraordinary events, which are the subjects of them ; as we find them quoted, and referred to by an uninterrupted succession of writers from those to the present times : nor would it be less easy to shew, that the truth of all those events, miracles only excepted, can no more be reasonably questioned, than the truth of any other facts recorded in any history whatever : as there can be no more reason to doubt, that there existed such a person as Jesus Christ, speaking, acting, and suffering in such a manner as is there described, than that there were such men as Tiberius, Herod, or Pontius Pilate, his contemporaries ; or to suspect, that Peter, Paul, and James were not the authors of those epistles, to which their names are affixed,

than

than that Cicero and Pliny did not write those which are ascribed to them. It might also be made appear, that these books having been wrote by various persons at different times, and in distant places, could not possibly have been the work of a single impostor, nor of a fraudulent combination, being all stamped with the same marks of an uniform originality in their very frame and composition.

But all these circumstances I shall pass over unobserved, as they do not fall in with the course of my argument, nor are necessary for the support of it. Whether these books were wrote by the authors whose names are prefixed to them, whether they have been enlarged, diminished, or any way corrupted by the artifice or ignorance of translators or transcribers; whether in the historical parts the writers were instructed by a perpetual, a partial, or by any inspiration at all; whether in the religious and moral parts, they received their doctrines from a divine influence, or from the instructions
and

and conversation of their master; whether in their facts or sentiments there is always the most exact agreement, or whether in both they sometimes differ from each other; whether they are in any case mistaken, or always infallible; or ever pretended to be so, I shall not here dispute: let the Deist avail himself of all these doubts and difficulties, and decide them in conformity to his own opinions, I shall not contend, because they affect not my argument: all that I assert is a plain fact, which cannot be denied, that such writings do now exist.

PROPOSITION II.

MY second proposition is not quite so simple, but, I think, not less undeniable than the former, and is this: That from this book may be extracted a system of religion entirely new, both with regard to the object, and the doctrines, not only infinitely superior to, but totally unlike every thing, which had ever before entered into the mind of man: I say extracted, because all the doctrines of this religion having been delivered at various times, and on various occasions, and here only historically recorded, no uniform or regular system of theology is here to be found; and better perhaps it had been, if less labour had been employed by the learned, to bend and twist these divine materials into the polished forms of human systems, to which they never will submit, and for which they were never intended by their great author. Why he chose not to leave

any such behind him we know not, but it might possibly be, because he knew, that the imperfection of man was incapable of receiving such a system, and that we are more properly, and more safely conducted by the distant and scattered rays, than by the too powerful sunshine of divine illumination : “ If I have told you earthly things,” says he, “ and ye believe not, how shall ye believe “ if I tell you of heavenly things* ?” that is, If my instructions concerning your behaviour in the present, as relative to a future life, are so difficult to be understood, that you can scarcely believe me, how shall you believe, if I endeavour to explain to you the nature of celestial beings, the designs of Providence, and the mysteries of his dispensations ; subjects which you have neither ideas to comprehend, nor language to express ?

First then, the object of this religion is entirely new, and is this ; to prepare us by a

* John iii. 12.

state of probation for the kingdom of heaven. This is every where professed by Christ and his apostles to be the chief end of the Christian's life ; the crown for which he is to contend, the goal to which he is to run, the harvest which is to pay him for all his labours : Yet previous to their preaching no such prize was ever hung out to mankind, nor any means prescribed for the attainment of it.

It is indeed true, that some of the philosophers of antiquity entertained notions of a future state, but mixed with much doubt and uncertainty : their legislators also endeavoured to infuse into the minds of the people a belief of rewards and punishments after death ; but by this they only intended to give a sanction to their laws, and to enforce the practice of virtue for the benefit of mankind in the present life : this alone seems to have been their end, and a meritorious end it was ; but Christianity not only operates more effectually to this end, but has a nobler design in view, which is, by a proper education

education here to render us fit members of a celestial society hereafter. In all former religions the good of the present life was the first object; in the Christian it is but the second; in those, men were incited to promote that good by the hopes of a future reward; in this, the practice of virtue is enjoined in order to qualify them for that reward. There is great difference, I apprehend, in these two plans, that is, in adhering to virtue from its present utility in expectation of future happiness, and living in such a manner as to qualify us for the acceptance and enjoyment of that happiness; and the conduct and dispositions of those, who act on these different principles, must be no less different: on the first, the constant practice of justice, temperance, and sobriety, will be sufficient; but on the latter, we must add to these an habitual piety, faith, resignation, and contempt of the world: the first may make us very good citizens, but will never produce a tolerable Christian. Hence it is that Christianity insists more strongly, than any preceding

preceding institution religious or moral, on purity of heart and a benevolent disposition ; because these are absolutely necessary to its great end ; but in those whose recommendations of virtue regard the present life only, and whose promised rewards in another were low and sensual, no preparatory qualifications were requisite to enable men to practise the one, or to enjoy the other : and therefore we see this object is peculiar to this religion ; and with it was entirely new.

But although this object, and the principle on which it is founded were new, and perhaps undiscoverable by reason, yet when discovered they are so consonant to it, that we cannot but readily assent to them. For the truth of this principle, that the present life is a state of probation, and education to prepare us for another, is confirmed by every thing which we see around us : it is the only key which can open to us the designs of Providence in the œconomy of human affairs, the only clue, which can guide us through that pathless wilderness, and the

only plan on which this world could possibly have been formed, or on which the history of it can be comprehended or explained. It could never have been formed on a plan of happiness: because it is every where overspread with innumerable miseries; nor of misery, because it is interspersed with many enjoyments: it could not have been constituted for a scene of wisdom and virtue, because the history of mankind is little more than a detail of their follies and wickedness: nor of vice, because that is no plan at all, being destructive of all existence, and consequently of its own. But on this system all that we here meet with, may be easily accounted for; for this mixture of happiness and misery, of virtue and vice, necessarily results from a state of probation and education; as probation implies trials, sufferings, and a capacity of offending, and education a propriety of chastisement for those offences.

In the next place, the doctrines of this religion are equally new with the object; and contain ideas of God, and of man, of the present,

sent, and of a future life ; and of the relations which all these bear to each other, totally unheard of, and quite dissimilar from any which had ever been thought on, previous to its publication. No other ever drew so just a portrait of the worthlessness of this world, and all its pursuits, nor exhibited such distinct, lively, and exquisite pictures of the joys of another ; of the resurrection of the dead, the last judgment, and the triumphs of the righteous in that tremendous day, “ when this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality*.” No other has ever represented the Supreme Being in the character of three persons united in one God †.

* 1 Cor. xv. 53.

† That there subsists some such union in the divine nature, the whole tenour of the New Testament seems to express, and it was so understood in the earliest ages : but whether this union does, or does not imply equality, or whether it subsists in general, or only in particular circumstances, we are not informed, and therefore on these questions it is not only unnecessary, but improper for us to decide.

No other has attempted to reconcile those seeming contradictory but both true propositions, the contingency of future events, and the foreknowledge of God, or the free will of the creature with the over-ruling grace of the Creator. No other has so fully declared the necessity of wickedness and punishment, yet so effectually instructed individuals to resist the one, and to escape the other: no other has ever pretended to give any account of the depravity of man, or to point out any remedy for it: no other has ventured to declare the unpardonable nature of sin without the influence of a mediatorial interposition, and a vicarious atonement from the sufferings of a superior being*. Whether these wonderful doctrines

* That Christ suffered and died as an atonement for the sins of mankind, is a doctrine so constantly and so strongly enforced through every part of the New Testament, that whoever will seriously peruse those writings, and deny that it is there, may, with as much reason and truth, after reading the works of Thucydides and Livy, assert, that in them no mention is made of any facts relative to the histories of Greece and Rome.

are

are worthy of our belief must depend on the opinion, which we entertain of the authority of those, who published them to the world ; but certain it is, that they are all so far removed from every tract of the human imagination, that it seems equally impossible, that they should ever have been derived from the knowledge or the artifice of man.

Some indeed there are, who, by perverting the established signification of words, (which they call explaining) have ventured to expunge all these doctrines out of the scriptures, for no other reason than that they are not able to comprehend them ; and argue thus :—The scriptures are the word of God ; in his word no propositions contradictory to reason can have a place ; these propositions are contradictory to reason, and therefore they are not there. But if these bold assertors would claim any regard, they should reverse their argument, and say,—These doctrines make a part, and a material part of the scriptures, they are contradictory to reason ; no propositions contradictory to

reason can be a part of the word of God, and therefore neither the scriptures, nor the pretended revelation contained in them, can be derived from him : This would be an argument worthy of rational and candid Deists, and demand a respectful attention ; but when men pretend to disprove facts by reasoning, they have no right to expect an answer.

And here I cannot omit observing, that the personal character of the author of this religion is no less new, and extraordinary, than the religion itself, who “ spake as never man spake *,” and lived as never man lived : in proof of this, I do not mean to alledge, that he was born of a virgin, that he fasted forty days, that he performed a variety of miracles, and after being buried three days, that he arose from the dead ; because these accounts will have but little effect on the minds of unbelievers, who, if they believe not the religion, will give no credit to

* John vii. 46,

the relation of these facts ; but I will prove it from facts which cannot be disputed ; for instance, he is the only founder of a religion in the history of mankind, which is totally unconnected with all human policy and government, and therefore totally uncondusive to any worldly purpose whatever : all others, Mahomet, Numa, and even Moses himself, blended their religious institutions with their civil, and by them obtained dominion over their respective people ; but Christ neither aimed at, nor would accept of any such power ; he rejected every object, which all other men pursue, and made choice of all those which others fly from, and are afraid of : he refused power, riches, honours, and pleasure, and courted poverty, ignominy, tortures, and death. Many have been the enthusiasts and impostors, who have endeavoured to impose on the world pretended revelations, and some of them from pride, obstinacy, or principle, have gone so far, as to lay down their lives, rather than retract ; but I defy history to shew one, who ever

made his own sufferings and death a necessary part of his original plan, and essential to his mission ; this Christ actually did, he foresaw, foretold, declared, their necessity, and voluntarily endured them. If we seriously contemplate the divine lessons, the perfect precepts, the beautiful discourses, and the consistent conduct of this wonderful person, we cannot possibly imagine, that he could have been either an idiot or a madman ; and yet, if he was not what he pretended to be, he can be considered in no other light ; and even under this character he would deserve some attention, because of so sublime and rational an insanity there is no other instance in the history of mankind.

If any one can doubt of the superior excellence of this religion above all which preceded it, let him but peruse with attention those unparalleled writings in which it is transmitted to the present times, and compare them with the most celebrated productions of the pagan world ; and if he is not sensible of their superior beauty, simplicity, and

and originality, I will venture to pronounce, that he is as deficient in taste as in faith, and that he is as bad a critic as a Christian : for in what school of ancient philosophy can he find a lesson of morality so perfect as Christ's sermon on the mount ? From which of them can he collect an address to the Deity so concise, and yet so comprehensive, so expressive of all that we want, and all that we could deprecate, as that short prayer, which he formed for, and recommended to his disciples ? From the works of what sage of antiquity can he produce so pathetic a recommendation of benevolence to the distressed, and enforced by such assurances of a reward, as in those words of Christ ? " Come, ye
 " blessed of my Father ! inherit the kingdom
 " prepared for you from the foundation of
 " the world : for I was an hungred, and ye
 " gave me meat ; I was thirsty, and ye gave
 " me drink ; I was a stranger, and ye took
 " me in ; I was naked, and ye clothed me ;
 " I was sick, and ye visited me ; I was in
 " prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall
 " the

“ the righteous answer him, saying—Lord,
 “ when saw we thee an hungred, and fed
 “ thee, or thirsty, and gave thee drink ? when
 “ saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in,
 “ or naked, and clothed thee ? or when saw
 “ we thee sick and in prison, and came unto
 “ thee ? Then shall I answer and say unto
 “ them,—Verily I say unto you, inasmuch
 “ as you have done it to the least of these
 “ my brethren, ye have done it unto me*.”

Where is there so just, and so elegant a reproof
 of eagerness and anxiety in worldly pursuits,
 closed with so forcible an exhortation to con-
 fidence in the goodness of our Creator, as in
 these words ?—“ Behold the fowls of the air ;
 “ for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor
 “ gather into barns, yet your heavenly Fa-
 “ ther feedeth them. Are ye not much bet-
 “ ter than they ? Consider the lilies of the
 “ field, how they grow ; they toil not, nei-
 “ ther do they spin ; and yet I say unto you,
 “ that even Solomon in all his glory was not

* Matt. xxv. 34.

“ arrayed

“ arrayed like one of these : wherefore, if
 “ God so clothe the grafs of the field, which
 “ to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the
 “ oven, shall he not much more clothe you ?
 “ O ye of little faith * !” By which of their
 most celebrated poets are the joys reserved
 for the righteous in a future state, so sub-
 limely described, as by this short declaration,
 that they are superior to all description ?
 “ Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither
 “ have entered into the heart of man, the
 “ things, which God hath prepared for them
 “ that love him †.” Where amidst the dark
 clouds of pagan philosophy can he shew us
 such a clear prospect of a future state, the
 immortality of the soul, the resurrection of
 the dead, and the general judgment, as in
 St. Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians ?
 Or from whence can he produce such co-
 gent exhortations to the practice of every
 virtue, such ardent incitements to piety and
 devotion, and such assistances to attain them,

* Matt. vi. 26, 28.

† 1 Cor. ii. 9.]

as those which are to be met with throughout every page of these inimitable writings? To quote all the passages in them relative to these subjects, would be almost to transcribe the whole; it is sufficient to observe, that they are every where stamped with such apparent marks of supernatural assistance, as render them indisputably superior to, and totally unlike all human compositions whatever; and this superiority and dissimilarity is still more strongly marked by one remarkable circumstance peculiar to themselves, which is, that whilst the moral parts, being of the most general use, are intelligible to the meanest capacities, the learned and inquisitive throughout all ages, perpetually find in them inexhaustible discoveries, concerning the nature, attributes, and dispensations of Providence.

To say the truth, before the appearance of Christianity there existed nothing like religion on the face of the earth; the Jewish only excepted: all other nations were immersed in the grossest idolatry, which had
little

little or no connection with morality, except to corrupt it by the infamous examples of their imaginary deities : they all worshipped a multiplicity of gods and dæmons, whose favour they courted by impious, obscene, and ridiculous ceremonies, and whose anger they endeavoured to appease by the most abominable cruelties. In the politest ages of the politest nations in the world, at a time when Greece and Rome had carried the arts of oratory, poetry, history, architecture, and sculpture to the highest perfection, and made no inconsiderable advances in those of mathematics, natural, and even moral philosophy, in religious knowledge they had made none at all ; a strong presumption, that the noblest efforts of the mind of man, unassisted by revelation, were unequal to the task. Some few indeed of their philosophers were wise enough to reject these general absurdities, and dared to attempt a loftier flight : Plato introduced many sublime ideas of nature, and its first cause, and of the immortality of the soul, which being above his own and all human

human discovery, he probably acquired from the books of Moses or the conversation of some Jewish rabbies, which he might have met with in Egypt, where he resided, and studied for several years: from him Aristotle, and from both Cicero and some few others drew most amazing stores of philosophical science, and carried their researches into divine truths as far as human genius alone could penetrate. But these were bright constellations, which appeared singly in several centuries, and even these with all this knowledge were very deficient in true theology. From the visible works of the creation they traced the being and principal attributes of the Creator; but the relation which his being and attributes bear to man they little understood; of piety and devotion they had scarce any sense, nor could they form any mode of worship worthy of the purity and perfection of the divine nature: they occasionally flung out many elegant encomiums on the native beauty, and excellence of virtue: but they founded it not

on the commands of God, nor connected it with a holy life, nor hung out the happiness of heaven as its reward, or its object. They sometimes talked of virtue carrying men to heaven, and placing them amongst the gods ; but by this virtue they meant only the invention of arts, or feats of arms : for with them heaven was open only to legislators, and conquerors, the civilizers, or destroyers of mankind. This was then the summit of religion in the most polished nations in the world, and even this was confined to a few philosophers, prodigies of genius and literature, who were little attended to, and less understood by the generality of mankind in their own countries ; whilst all the rest were involved in one common cloud of ignorance and superstition.

At this time Christianity broke forth from the east like a rising sun, and dispelled this universal darkness, which obscured every part of the globe, and even at this day prevails in all those remoter regions, to which
its

its salutary influence has not as yet extended. From all those which it has reached, it has notwithstanding its corruptions, banished all those enormities, and introduced a more rational devotion, and purer morals: it has taught men the unity, and attributes of the Supreme Being, the remission of sins, the resurrection of the dead, life everlasting, and the kingdom of heaven; doctrines as inconceivable to the wisest of mankind, antecedent to its appearance, as the Newtonian system is at this day to the most ignorant tribes of savages in the wilds of America; doctrines, which human reason never could have discovered, but which when discovered, coincide with, and are confirmed by it; and which, though beyond the reach of all the learning and penetration of Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero, are now clearly laid open to the eye of every peasant and mechanic with the bible in his hand. These are all plain facts too glaring to be contradicted, and therefore, whatever we may think of the authority of
these

these books, the relations which they contain, or the inspiration of their authors, of these facts no man, who has eyes to read, or ears to hear, can entertain a doubt ; because there are the books, and in them is this religion.

PROPOSITION III.

MY third proposition is this ; That from this book called the New Testament, may be collected a system of ethics, in which every moral precept founded on reason is carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection, than in any other of the antient philosophers of preceding ages ; every moral precept founded on false principles is entirely omitted, and many new precepts added, peculiarly corresponding with the new object of this religion.

By moral precepts founded on reason, I mean all those, which enforce the practice of such duties as reason informs us must improve our natures, and conduce to the happiness of mankind : such are piety to God, benevolence to men, justice, charity, temperance, and sobriety, with all those, which prohibit the commission of the contrary vices, all which debase our natures, and, by mutual injuries,

injuries, introduce universal disorder, and consequently universal misery. By precepts founded on false principles, I mean those which recommend fictitious virtues productive of none of these salutary effects, and therefore, however celebrated and admired, are in fact no virtues at all; such are valour, patriotism, and friendship.

That virtues of the first kind are carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection by the Christian religion than by any other, it is here unnecessary to prove, because this is a truth, which has been frequently demonstrated by her friends, and never once denied by the most determined of her adversaries; but it will be proper to shew, that those of the latter sort are most judiciously omitted; because they have really no intrinsic merit in them, and are totally incompatible with the genius and spirit of this institution.

Valour, for instance, or active courage, is for the most part constitutional, and therefore can have no more claim to moral merit, than wit, beauty, health, strength, or any

other endowment of the mind or body ; and so far is it from producing any salutary effects by introducing peace, order, or happiness into society, that it is the usual perpetrator of all the violences, which from retaliated injuries distract the world with bloodshed and devastation. It is the engine by which the strong are enabled to plunder the weak, the proud to trample upon the humble, and the guilty to oppress the innocent ; it is the chief instrument which Ambition employs in her unjust pursuits of wealth and power, and is therefore so much extolled by her votaries : it was indeed congenial with the religion of pagans, whose gods were for the most part made out of deceased heroes, exalted to heaven as a reward for the mischiefs which they had perpetrated upon earth, and therefore with them this was the first of virtues, and had even engrossed that denomination to itself ; but whatever merit it may have assumed among pagans, with Christians it can pretend to none, and few or none are the occasions in which they are permitted

permitted to exert it : they are so far from being allowed to inflict evil, that they are forbid even to resist it : they are so far from being encouraged to revenge injuries, that one of their first duties is to forgive them ; so far from being incited to destroy their enemies, that they are commanded to love them, and to serve them to the utmost of their power. If Christian nations therefore were nations of Christians, all war would be impossible and unknown amongst them, and valour could be neither of use nor estimation, and therefore could never have a place in the catalogue of Christian virtues, being irreconcilable with all its precepts. I object not to the praise and honours bestowed on the valiant, they are the least tribute which can be paid them by those who enjoy safety and affluence by the intervention of their dangers and sufferings : I assert only that active courage can never be a Christian virtue, because a Christian can have nothing to do with it. Passive courage is indeed frequently, and properly inculcated by this

meek and suffering religion, under the titles of patience and resignation : a real and substantial virtue this, and a direct contrast to the former ; for passive courage arises from the noblest dispositions of the human mind, from a contempt of misfortunes, pain, and death, and a confidence in the protection of the Almighty ; active, from the meanest ; from passion, vanity, and self-dependence : passive courage is derived from a zeal for truth, and a perseverance in duty ; active, is the offspring of pride and revenge, and the parent of cruelty and injustice : in short, passive courage is the resolution of a philosopher ; active, the ferocity of a savage. Nor is this more incompatible with the precepts, than with the object of this religion, which is the attainment of the kingdom of heaven ; for valour is not that sort of violence, by which that kingdom is to be taken ; nor are the turbulent spirits of heroes and conquerors admissible into those regions of peace, subordination, and tranquillity.

Patriotism also, that celebrated virtue so
much

much practised in antient, and so much professed in modern times, that virtue, which so long preserved the liberties of Greece, and exalted Rome to the empire of the world : this celebrated virtue, I say, must also be excluded ; because it not only falls short of, but directly counteracts, the extensive benevolence of this religion. A Christian is of no country, he is a citizen of the world ; and his neighbours and countrymen are the inhabitants of the remotest regions, whenever their distresses demand his friendly assistance : Christianity commands us to love all mankind, patriotism to oppress all other countries to advance the imaginary prosperity of our own : Christianity enjoins us to imitate the universal benevolence of our Creator, who pours forth his blessings on every nation upon earth ; patriotism, to copy the mean partiality of an English parish officer, who thinks injustice and cruelty meritorious, whenever they promote the interests of his own inconsiderable village. This has ever been a favourite virtue with man-

kind, because it conceals self-interest under the mask of public spirit, not only from others, but even from themselves, and gives a licence to inflict wrongs and injuries not only with impunity, but with applause ; but it is so diametrically opposite to the great characteristic of this institution, that it never could have been admitted into the list of Christian virtues.

Friendship likewise, although more congenial to the principles of Christianity, arising from more tender and amiable dispositions, could never gain admittance amongst her benevolent precepts, for the same reason ; because it is too narrow and confined, and appropriates that benevolence to a single object, which is here commanded to be extended over all. Where friendships arise from similarity of sentiments, and disinterested affections, they are advantageous, agreeable, and innocent, but have little pretensions to merit ; for it is justly observed, “ If ye love them, which love you, what thanks have ye ? for sinners also love those,

5

“ that

“ that love them *.” But if they are formed from alliances in parties, factions, and interests, or from a participation of vices, the usual parents of what are called friendships among mankind, they are then both mischievous and criminal, and consequently forbidden; but in their utmost purity deserve no recommendation from this religion.

To the judicious omission of these false virtues we may add that remarkable silence, which the Christian legislator every where preserves on subjects esteemed by all others of the highest importance, civil government, national policy, and the rights of war and peace; of these he has not taken the least notice, probably for this plain reason, because it would have been impossible to have formed any explicit regulations concerning them, which must not have been inconsistent with the purity of his religion, or with the practical observance of such imperfect crea-

* Luke vi. 32.

tures as men ruling over, and contending with each other: for instance, had he absolutely forbid all resistance to the reigning powers, he had constituted a plan of despotism, and made men slaves; had he allowed it, he must have authorised disobedience, and made them rebels: had he in direct terms prohibited all war, he must have left his followers for ever an easy prey to every infidel invader; had he permitted it, he must have licensed all that rapine and murder, with which it is unavoidably attended.

Let us now examine what are those new precepts in this religion peculiarly corresponding with the new object of it, that is, preparing us for the kingdom of heaven: of these the chief are poorness of spirit, forgiveness of injuries, and charity to all men; to these we may add repentance, faith, self-abasement, and a detachment from the world, all moral duties peculiar to this religion, and absolutely necessary to the attainment of its end.

“ Blessed

“Blessed are the poor in spirit ; for theirs
 “is the kingdom of heaven* :” by which
 poorness of spirit is to be understood a disposition of mind, meek, humble, submissive to power, void of ambition, patient of injuries, and free from all resentment. This was so new, and so opposite to the ideas of all pagan moralists, that they thought this temper of mind a criminal and contemptible meanness, which must induce men to sacrifice the glory of their country, and their own honour, to a shameful pusillanimity ; and such it appears to almost all who are called Christians even at this day, who not only reject it in practice, but disavow it in principle, notwithstanding this explicit declaration of their master. We see them revenging the smallest affronts by premeditated murder, as individuals, on principles of honour ; and, in their national capacities, destroying each other with fire and sword, for the low considerations of commercial interests, the balance of

* Matt. v. 3.

rival powers, or the ambition of princes : we see them with their last breath animating each other to a savage revenge, and, in the agonies of death, plunging with feeble arms their daggers into the hearts of their opponents : and, what is still worse, we hear all these barbarisms celebrated by historians, flattered by poets, applauded in theatres, approved in senates, and even sanctified in pulpits. But universal practice cannot alter the nature of things, nor universal error change the nature of truth : pride was not made for man ; but humility, meekness, and resignation, that is poorness of spirit, was made for man ; and properly belongs to his dependent and precarious situation ; and is the only disposition of mind, which can enable him to enjoy ease and quiet here, and happiness hereafter : yet was this important precept entirely unknown until it was promulgated by him, who said, “ Suffer little children to
 “ come unto me, and forbid them not ; for
 “ of such is the kingdom of heaven : Verily
 “ I say unto you, whoever shall not receive
 “ the

“ the kingdom of God as a little child, he
 “ shall not enter therein *.”

Another precept, equally new and no less excellent, is forgiveness of injuries: “ Ye
 “ have heard,” says Christ to his disciples,
 “ Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate
 “ thine enemy; but I say unto you, love
 “ your enemies; bless them that curse you, do
 “ good to them that hate you, and pray for
 “ them which despitefully use you, and per-
 “ secute you †.” This was a lesson so new,
 and so utterly unknown, till taught by his
 doctrines, and enforced by his example, that
 the wisest moralists of the wisest nations and
 ages represented the desire of revenge as a
 mark of a noble mind, and the accomplish-
 ment of it as one of the chief felicities at-
 tendant on a fortunate man. But how much
 more magnanimous, how much more bene-
 ficial to mankind, is forgiveness! it is more
 magnanimous, because every generous and
 exalted disposition of the human mind is re-

* Matt. x. 14.

† Matt. v. 43.

quisite to the practice of it: for these alone can enable us to bear the wrongs and insults of wickedness and folly with patience, and to look down on the perpetrators of them with pity, rather than indignation; these alone can teach us, that such are but a part of those sufferings allotted to us in this state of probation, and to know, that to overcome evil with good, is the most glorious of all victories: it is the most beneficial, because this amiable conduct alone can put an end to an eternal succession of injuries and retaliations; for every retaliation becomes a new injury, and requires another act of revenge for satisfaction. But would we observe this salutary precept, to love our enemies, and to do good to those who despitefully use us, this obstinate benevolence would at last conquer the most inveterate hearts, and we should have no enemies to forgive. How much more exalted a character therefore is a Christian martyr, suffering with resignation, and praying for the guilty, than that of a Pagan hero, breathing revenge, and destroying the innocent!

innocent! Yet, noble and useful as this virtue is, before the appearance of this religion it was not only unpractised, but decried in principle as mean and ignominious, though so obvious a remedy for most of the miseries of this life, and so necessary a qualification for the happiness of another.

A third precept, first noticed and first enjoined by this institution, is charity to all men. What this is, we may best learn from this admirable description, painted in the following words: "Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself; is not puffed up; doth not behave itself unseemly; seeketh not her own; is not easily provoked; thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in truth; feareth all things; believeth all things; hopeth all things; endureth all things*." Here we have an accurate delineation of this bright constellation of all virtues; which consists not, as

* 1 Cor. xiii. 4.

many imagine, in the building of monasteries, endowment of hospitals, or the distribution of alms; but in such an amiable disposition of mind, as exercises itself every hour in acts of kindness, patience, complacency, and benevolence to all around us, and which alone is able to promote happiness in the present life, or render us capable of receiving it in another: and yet this is totally new, and so it is declared to be by the author of it: "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye love one another; by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another*." This benevolent disposition is made the great characteristic of a Christian, the test of his obedience, and the mark by which he is to be distinguished. This love for each other is that charity just now described, and contains all those qualities, which are there attributed to it; humility,

* John xiii. 34.

patience,

patience, meekness, and beneficence : without which we must live in perpetual discord, and consequently cannot pay obedience to this commandment by loving one another ; a commandment so sublime, so rational, and so beneficial, so wisely calculated to correct the depravity, diminish the wickedness, and abate the miseries of human nature, that, did we universally comply with it, we should soon be relieved from all the inquietudes arising from our own unruly passions, anger, envy, revenge, malice, and ambition, as well as from all those injuries to which we are perpetually exposed from the indulgence of the same passions in others. It would also preserve our minds in such a state of tranquillity, and so prepare them for the kingdom of heaven, that we should slide out of a life of peace, love, and benevolence, into that celestial society, by an almost imperceptible transition. Yet was this commandment entirely new, when given by him, who so intitles it, and has made it the capital duty of his religion, because the most indispensa-

bly necessary to the attainment of its great object, the kingdom of heaven ; into which if proud, turbulent, and vindictive spirits were permitted to enter, they must unavoidably destroy the happiness of that state by the operations of the same passions and vices, by which they disturb the present ; and therefore all such must be eternally excluded, not only as a punishment, but also from incapacity.

Repentance, by this we plainly see, is another new moral duty strenuously insisted on by this religion, and by no other, because absolutely necessary to the accomplishment of its end ; for this alone can purge us from those transgressions, from which we cannot be totally exempted in this state of trial and temptation, and purify us from that depravity in our nature, which renders us incapable of attaining this end. Hence also we may learn, that no repentance can remove this incapacity, but such as entirely changes the nature and disposition of the offender ; which in the language of scripture is called “ being born again.” Mere contrition for

past crimes, nor even the pardon of them, cannot effect this, unless it operates to this entire conversion or new birth, as it is properly and emphatically named: for sorrow can no more purify a mind corrupted by a long continuance in vicious habits, than it can restore health to a body distempered by a long course of vice and intemperance. Hence also every one, who is in the least acquainted with himself, may judge of the reasonableness of the hope that is in him, and of his situation in a future state by that of his present. If he feels in himself a temper proud, turbulent, vindictive, and malevolent, and a violent attachment to the pleasures or business of the world, he may be assured, that he must be excluded from the kingdom of heaven; not only because his conduct can merit no such reward, but because, if admitted, he would find there no objects satisfactory to his passions, inclinations, and pursuits, and therefore could only disturb the happiness of others without enjoying any share of it himself.

Faith is another moral duty enjoined by this institution, of a species so new, that the philosophers of antiquity had no word expressive of this idea, nor any such idea to be expressed; for the word *πιστις* or *fides*, which we translate faith, was never used by any pagan writer in a sense the least similar to that, to which it is applied in the New Testament: where in general it signifies an humble, teachable, and candid disposition, a trust in God, and confidence in his promises; when applied particularly to Christianity, it means no more than a belief of this single proposition, That Christ was the son of God; that is, in the language of those writings, the Messiah, who was foretold by the prophets, and expected by the Jews; who was sent by God into the world to preach righteousness, judgment, and everlasting life, and to die as an atonement for the sins of mankind. This was all that Christ required to be believed by those who were willing to become his disciples: he, who does not believe this, is not a Christian, and he who does, believes the whole

whole that is essential to his profession, and all that is properly comprehended under the name of faith. This unfortunate word has indeed been so tortured and so misapplied to mean every absurdity, which artifice could impose upon ignorance, that it has lost all pretensions to the title of virtue; but if brought back to the simplicity of its original signification, it well deserves that name, because it usually arises from the most amiable dispositions, and is always a direct contrast to pride, obstinacy, and self-conceit. If taken in the extensive sense of an assent to the evidence of things not seen, it comprehends the existence of a God, and a future state, and is therefore not only itself a moral virtue, but the source from whence all others must proceed; for on the belief of these all religion and morality must entirely depend. It cannot be altogether void of moral merit, (as some would represent it) because it is in a degree voluntary; for daily experience shews us, that men not only pretend to, but actually do believe, and disbe-

lieve, almost any propositions, which best suit their interests, or inclinations, and unfeignedly change their sincere opinions with their situations and circumstances. For we have power over the mind's eye, as well as over the body's, to shut it against the strongest rays of truth and religion, whenever they become painful to us, and to open it again to the faint glimmerings of scepticism and infidelity when we "love darkness rather than light, because our deeds are evil *." And this, I think, sufficiently refutes all objections to the moral nature of faith, drawn from the supposition of its being quite involuntary, and necessarily dependent on the degree of evidence, which is offered to our understandings.

Self-abasement is another moral duty inculcated by this religion only; which requires us to impute even our own virtues to the grace and favour of our Creator, and to acknowledge, that we can do nothing good by our own powers, unless assisted by his

* John iii. 19.

over-ruling influence. This doctrine seems at first sight to infringe on our free-will, and to deprive us of all merit ; but, on a closer examination, the truth of it may be demonstrated both by reason and experience, and that in fact it does not impair the one, or depreciate the other : and that it is productive of so much humility, resignation, and dependance on God, that it justly claims a place amongst the most illustrious moral virtues. Yet was this duty utterly repugnant to the proud and self-sufficient principles of the antient philosophers as well as modern Deists, and therefore before the publication of the gospel totally unknown and uncomprehended.

Detachment from the world is another moral virtue constituted by this religion alone : so new, that even at this day few of its professors can be persuaded, that it is required, or that it is any virtue at all. By this detachment from the world is not to be understood a seclusion from society, abstraction from all business, or retirement to a

gloomy cloyster. Industry and labour, cheerfulness and hospitality are frequently recommended: nor is the acquisition of wealth and honours prohibited, if they can be obtained by honest means, and a moderate degree of attention and care: but such an unremitted anxiety, and perpetual application as engrosses our whole time and thoughts, are forbid, because they are incompatible with the spirit of this religion, and must utterly disqualify us for the attainment of its great end. We toil on in the vain pursuits and frivolous occupations of the world, die in our harness, and then expect, if no gigantic crime stands in the way, to step immediately into the kingdom of heaven: but this is impossible; for without a previous detachment from the business of this world, we cannot be prepared for the happiness of another. Yet this could make no part of the morality of pagans, because their virtues were altogether connected with this business, and consisted chiefly in conducting it with honour to themselves, and benefit to the public: but

Christianity

Christianity has a nobler object in view, which, if not attended to, must be lost forever. This object is that celestial mansion of which we should never lose sight, and to which we should be ever advancing during our journey through life : but this by no means precludes us from performing the business, or enjoying the amusements of travellers, provided they detain us not too long, or lead us too far out of our way.

It cannot be denied, that the great author of the Christian institution, first and singly ventured to oppose all the chief principles of pagan virtue, and to introduce a religion directly opposite to those erroneous though long-established opinions, both in its duties and in its object. The most celebrated virtues of the ancients were high spirit, intrepid courage, and implacable resentment.

Impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer,
 was the portrait of the most illustrious hero, drawn by one of the first poets of antiquity. To all these admired qualities, those of a true Christian are an exact contrast ; for this
 religion

religion constantly enjoins poorness of spirit, meekness, patience, and forgiveness of injuries. "But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil; but whoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also*." The favourite characters among the Pagans were the turbulent, ambitious, and intrepid, who through toils and dangers acquired wealth, and spent it in luxury, magnificence, and corruption; but both these are equally adverse to the Christian system, which forbids all extraordinary efforts to obtain wealth, care to secure, or thought concerning the enjoyment of it. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth, &c." "Take no thought, saying, what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be cloathed? for after all these things do the Gentiles seek†." The chief object of the Pagans was immortal fame: for this their poets sang, their heroes fought, and their patriots died; and this was hung out by their philosophers and legisla-

* Matt. v. 39.

† Matt. vi. 31.

tors, as the great incitement to all noble and virtuous deeds. But what says the Christian legislator to his disciples on this subject? "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and shall say all manner of evil against you for my sake; rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven*." So widely different is the genius of the Pagan and Christian morality, that I will venture to affirm, that the most celebrated virtues of the former are more opposite to the spirit, and more inconsistent with the end of the latter, than even their most infamous vices; and that a Brutus wrenching vengeance out of his hands to whom alone it belongs, by murdering the oppressor of his country, or a Cato murdering himself from an impatience of controul, leaves the world more unqualified for, and more inadmissible into the kingdom of heaven, than even a Messalina, or an Heliogabalus, with all their profligacy about them.

Nothing, I believe, has so much contri-

* Matt. v. 11.

buted

buted to corrupt the true spirit of the Christian institution, as that partiality, which we contract from our earliest education for the manners of pagan antiquity : from whence we learn to adopt every moral idea, which is repugnant to it ; to applaud false virtues, which that disavows ; to be guided by laws of honour, which that abhors ; to imitate characters, which that detests ; and to behold heroes, patriots, conquerors, and suicides with admiration, whose conduct that utterly condemns. From a coalition of these opposite principles was generated that monstrous system of cruelty and benevolence, of barbarism and civility, of rapine and justice, of fighting and devotion, of revenge and generosity, which harrassed the world for several centuries with crusades, holy wars, knight-errantry, and single combats, and even still retains influence enough, under the name of honour, to defeat the most beneficent ends of this holy institution. I mean not by this to pass any censure on the principles of valour, patriotism, or honour :
they

they may be useful, and perhaps necessary, in the commerce and business of the present turbulent and imperfect state; and those who are actuated by them may be virtuous, honest, and even religious men: all that I assert is, that they cannot be Christians. A profligate may be a Christian, though a bad one, because he may be overpowered by passions and temptations, and his actions may contradict his principles; but a man, whose ruling principle is honour, however virtuous he may be, cannot be a Christian, because he erects a standard of duty, and deliberately adheres to it, diametrically opposite to the whole tenour of that religion.

The contrast between the Christian, and all other institutions religious or moral, previous to its appearance, is sufficiently evident, and surely the superiority of the former is as little to be disputed; unless any one shall undertake to prove, that humility, patience, forgiveness, and benevolence are less amiable, and less beneficial qualities, than pride, turbulence, revenge, and malignity:

nity : that the contempt of riches is less noble, than the acquisition by fraud and villainy, or the distribution of them to the poor, less commendable than avarice or profusion; or that a real immortality in the kingdom of heaven is an object less exalted, less rational, and less worthy of pursuit, than an imaginary immortality in the applause of men: that worthless tribute, which the folly of one part of mankind pays to the wickedness of the other; a tribute, which a wise man ought always to despise, because a good man can scarce ever obtain.

CON-

C O N C L U S I O N.

IF I mistake not, I have now fully established the truth of my three propositions.

First, That there is now extant a book intituled the New Testament.

Secondly, That from this book may be extracted a system of religion entirely new; both in its object, and its doctrines, not only superior to, but totally unlike every thing, which had ever before entered into the mind of man.

Thirdly, That from this book may likewise be collected a system of ethics, in which every moral precept founded on reason is carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection, than in any other of the wisest philosophers of preceding ages; every moral precept founded on false principles totally omitted, and many new precepts added, peculiarly

culiarly corresponding with the new object of this religion.

Every one of these propositions, I am persuaded, is incontrovertibly true ; and if true, this short, but certain conclusion must inevitably follow ; That such a system of religion and morality could not possibly have been the work of any man, or set of men, much less of those obscure, ignorant, and illiterate persons who actually did discover, and publish it to the world ; and that therefore it must have been effected by the supernatural interposition of divine power and wisdom ; that is, that it must derive its origin from God.

This argument seems to me little short of demonstration, and is indeed founded on the very same reasoning, by which the material world is proved to be the work of his invisible hand. We view with admiration the heavens and the earth, and all therein contained ; we contemplate with amazement the minute bodies of animals too small for perception

ception, and the immense planetary orbs too vast for imagination: We are certain that these cannot be the works of man; and therefore we conclude with reason, that they must be the productions of an omnipotent Creator. In the same manner we see here a scheme of religion and morality unlike and superior to all ideas of the human mind, equally impossible to have been discovered by the knowledge, as invented by the artifice of man; and therefore by the very same mode of reasoning, and with the same justice, we conclude, that it must derive its origin from the same omnipotent and omniscient Being.

Nor was the propagation of this religion less extraordinary than the religion itself, or less above the reach of all human power, than the discovery of it was above that of all human understanding. It is well known, that in the course of a very few years it was spread over all the principal parts of Asia and of Europe, and this by the ministry only of an inconsiderable number of the

most inconsiderable persons; that at this time Paganism was in the highest repute, believed universally by the vulgar, and patronised by the great; that the wisest men of the wisest nations assisted at its sacrifices, and consulted its oracles on the most important occasions: Whether these were the tricks of the priests or of the devil, is of no consequence, as they were both equally unlikely to be converted, or overcome; the fact is certain, that on the preaching of a few fishermen, their altars were deserted, and their deities were dumb. This miracle they undoubtedly performed, whatever we may think of the rest: and this is surely sufficient to prove the authority of their commission; and to convince us, that neither their undertaking nor the execution of it could possibly be their own.

How much this divine institution has been corrupted, or how soon these corruptions began, how far it has been discoloured by the false notions of illiterate ages, or blended with fictions by pious frauds, or
how

how early these notions and fictions were introduced, no learning or sagacity is now able precisely to ascertain ; but surely no man, who seriously considers the excellence and novelty of its doctrines, the manner in which it was at first propagated through the world, the persons who atchieved that wonderful work, and the originality of those writings in which it is still recorded, can possibly believe that it could ever have been the production of imposture, or chance ; or that from an imposture the most wicked and blasphemous (for if an imposture, such it is) all the religion and virtue now existing on earth can derive their source.

But notwithstanding what has been here urged, if any man can believe, that at a time when the literature of Greece and Rome, then in their meridian lustre, were insufficient for the task, the son of a carpenter, together with twelve of the meanest and most illiterate mechanics, his associates, unassisted by any supernatural power, should be able to discover or invent a system of theology

the most sublime, and of ethics the most perfect, which had escaped the penetration and learning of Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero ; and that from this system, by their own sagacity, they had excluded every false virtue, though universally admired, and admitted every true virtue, though despised and ridiculed by all the rest of the world : If any one can believe that these men could become impostors, for no other purpose than the propagation of truth, villains for no end but to teach honesty, and martyrs without the least prospect of honour or advantage ; or that, if all this should have been possible, these few inconsiderable persons should have been able, in the course of a few years, to have spread this their religion over most parts of the then known world, in opposition to the interests, pleasures, ambition, prejudices, and even reason of mankind ; to have triumphed over the power of princes, the intrigues of states, the force of custom, the blindness of zeal, the influence of priests, the arguments of orators, and the philosophy of the world, without

without any supernatural assistance ; if any one can believe all these miraculous events, contradictory to the constant experience of the powers and dispositions of human nature, he must be possessed of much more faith than is necessary to make him a Christian, and remain an unbeliever from mere credulity.

But should these credulous infidels after all be in the right, and this pretended revelation be all a fable ; from believing it what harm could ensue ? Would it render princes more tyrannical, or subjects more ungovernable ? the rich more insolent, or the poor more disorderly ? Would it make worse parents or children, husbands or wives, masters or servants, friends or neighbours ? Or would it not make men more virtuous, and consequently more happy in every situation ? It could not be criminal ; it could not be detrimental. It could not be criminal, because it cannot be a crime to assent to such evidence, as has been able to convince the best and wisest of mankind ; by

which, if false, Providence must have permitted men to deceive each other, for the most beneficial ends, and which therefore it would be surely more meritorious to believe, from a disposition of faith and charity, which believeth all things, than to reject with scorn from obstinacy and self-conceit: It cannot be detrimental, because if Christianity is a fable, it is a fable, the belief of which is the only principle which can retain men in a steady and uniform course of virtue, piety, and devotion, or can support them in the hour of distress, of sickness, and of death. Whatever might be the operations of true deism on the minds of pagan philosophers, that can now avail us nothing: for that light which once lightened the Gentiles, is now absorbed in the brighter illumination of the gospel; we can now form no rational system of deism, but what must be borrowed from that source, and, as far as it reaches towards perfection, must be exactly the same; and therefore if we will not accept of Christianity, we can have no religion at all. Accordingly

cordingly we see, that those who fly from this, scarce ever stop at deism ; but hasten on with great alacrity to a total rejection of all religious and moral principles whatever.

If I have here demonstrated the divine origin of the Christian religion by an argument which cannot be confuted ; no others, however plausible or numerous, founded on probabilities, doubts, and conjectures, can ever disprove it, because if it is once shewn to be true, it cannot be false. But as many arguments of this kind have bewildered some candid and ingenuous minds, I shall here bestow a few lines on those which have the most weight, in order to wipe out, or at least to diminish their perplexing influence.

But here I must previously observe, that the most unfurmountable, as well as the most usual obstacle to our belief, arises from our passions, appetites, and interests ; for faith being an act of the will as much as of the understanding, we oftener disbelieve for want of inclination, than want of evidence. The first step towards thinking this revela-

tion true, is our hopes that it is so; for whenever we much wish any proposition to be true, we are not far from believing it. It is certainly for the interest of all good men, that its authority should be well founded; and still more beneficial to the bad, if ever they intend to be better: because it is the only system either of reason or religion which can give them any assurance of pardon. The punishment of vice is a debt due to justice, which cannot be remitted without compensation: repentance can be no compensation; it may change a wicked man's dispositions, and prevent his offending for the future, but can lay no claim to pardon for what is past. If any one by profligacy and extravagance contracts a debt, repentance may make him wiser, and hinder him from running into further distresses, but can never pay off his old bonds; for which he must be ever accountable, unless they are discharged by himself, or some other in his stead: this very discharge Christianity alone holds forth on our repentance,

pentance, and, if true, will certainly perform : the truth of it therefore must ardently be wished for by all, except the wicked, who are determined neither to repent or reform. It is well worth every man's while, who either is, or intends to be virtuous, to believe Christianity, if he can ; because he will find it the surest preservative against all vicious habits and their attendant evils, the best resource under distresses and disappointments, ill health, and ill fortune, and the firmest basis on which contemplation can rest ; and without some, the human mind is never perfectly at ease. But if any one is attached to a favourite pleasure, or eagerly engaged in worldly pursuits incompatible with the precepts of this religion, and he believes it, he must either relinquish those pursuits with uneasiness, or persist in them with remorse and dissatisfaction, and therefore must commence unbeliever in his own defence. With such I shall not dispute, nor pretend to persuade men by arguments to make themselves miserable : but to those, who, not
afraid

afraid that this religion may be true, are really affected by such objections, I will offer the following answers, which, though short, will, I doubt not, be sufficient to shew them their weakness and futility.

In the first place, then, some have been so bold as to strike at the root of all revelation from God, by asserting, that it is incredible, because unnecessary, and unnecessary, because the reason which he has bestowed on mankind is sufficiently able to discover all the religious and moral duties which he requires of them, if they would but attend to her precepts, and be guided by her friendly admonitions. Mankind have undoubtedly at various times from the remotest ages received so much knowledge by divine communications, and have ever been so much inclined to impute it all to their own sufficiency, that it is now difficult to determine what human reason unassisted can effect : But to form a true judgment on this subject, let us turn our eyes to those remote regions of the globe, to which this supernatural assistance

sistance has never yet extended, and we shall
 there see men endued with sense and reason
 not inferior to our own, so far from being
 capable of forming systems of religion and
 morality, that they are at this day totally
 unable to make a nail or a hatchet: from
 whence we may surely be convinced, that
 reason alone is so far from being sufficient to
 offer to mankind a perfect religion, that it
 has never yet been able to lead them to
 any degree of culture or civilization what-
 ever. These have uniformly flowed from
 that great fountain of divine communica-
 tion opened in the east, in the earliest ages,
 and thence been gradually diffused in salu-
 brious streams, throughout the various re-
 gions of the earth. Their rise and progress,
 by surveying the history of the world, may
 easily be traced backwards to their source;
 and wherever these have not as yet been able
 to penetrate, we there find the human spe-
 cies not only void of all true religious
 and moral sentiments, but not the least
 emerged from their original ignorance and
 barbarity;

barbarity; which seems a demonstration, that although human reason is capable of progression in science, yet the first foundations must be laid by supernatural instructions: for surely no other probable cause can be assigned, why one part of mankind should have made such an amazing progress in religious, moral, metaphysical, and philosophical enquiries; such wonderful improvements in policy, legislation, commerce, and manufactures, while the other part, formed with the same natural capacities, and divided only by seas and mountains, should remain, during the same number of ages, in a state little superior to brutes, without government, without laws or letters, and even without clothes and habitations; murdering each other to satiate their revenge, and devouring each other to appease their hunger: I say no cause can be assigned for this amazing difference, except that the first have received information from those divine communications recorded in the scriptures, and the latter have never yet been favoured with such assistance.

assistance. This remarkable contrast seems an unanswerable, though perhaps a new proof of the necessity of revelation, and a solid refutation of all arguments against it, drawn from the sufficiency of human reason. And as reason in her natural state is thus incapable of making any progress in knowledge; so when furnished with materials by supernatural aid, if left to the guidance of her own wild imaginations, she falls into more numerous and more gross errors, than her own native ignorance could ever have suggested. There is then no absurdity so extravagant, which she is not ready to adopt: she has persuaded some, that there is no God; others, that there can be no future state: she has taught some, that there is no difference between vice and virtue, and that to cut a man's throat and to relieve his necessities are actions equally meritorious: she has convinced many, that they have no free-will, in opposition to their own experience; some, that there can be no such thing as soul, or spirit, contrary to their own perceptions;

ceptions ; and others, no such thing as matter or body, in contradiction to their senses. By analysing all things she can shew, that there is nothing in any thing ; by perpetual sifting she can reduce all existence to the invisible dust of scepticism ; and by recurring to first principles, prove to the satisfaction of her followers, that there are no principles at all. How far such a guide is to be depended on in the important concerns of religion, and morals, I leave to the judgment of every considerate man to determine. This is certain, that human reason in its highest state of cultivation amongst the philosophers of Greece and Rome, was never able to form a religion comparable to Christianity ; nor have all those sources of moral virtue, such as truth, beauty, and the fitness of things, which modern philosophers have endeavoured to substitute in its stead, ever been effectual to produce good men, and have themselves often been the productions of some of the worst.

Others there are, who allow, that a revelation

tion from God may be both necessary, and credible; but alledge, that the scriptures, that is the books of the Old and New Testament, cannot be that revelation; because in them are to be found errors and inconsistencies, fabulous stories, false facts, and false philosophy; which can never be derived from the fountain of all wisdom and truth. To this I reply, that I readily acknowledge, that the scriptures are not revelations from God, but the history of them: The revelation itself is derived from God; but the history of it is the production of men, and therefore the truth of it is not in the least affected by their fallibility, but depends on the internal evidence of its own supernatural excellence. If in these books such a religion, as has been here described, actually exists, no seeming, or even real defects to be found in them can disprove the divine origin of this religion, or invalidate my argument. Let us, for instance, grant that the Mosaic history of the creation was founded on the erroneous but popular principles

ciples of those early ages, who imagined the earth to be a vast plain, and the celestial bodies no more than luminaries hung up in the concave firmament to enlighten it; will it from thence follow, that Moses could not be a proper instrument in the hands of Providence, to impart to the Jews a divine law, because he was not inspired with a foreknowledge of the Copernican and Newtonian systems? or that Christ must be an impostor, because Moses was not an astronomer? Let us also suppose, that the accounts of Christ's temptation in the wilderness, the devil's taking refuge in the herd of swine, with several other narrations in the New Testament, frequently ridiculed by unbelievers, were all but stories accommodated to the ignorance and superstitions of the times and countries in which they were written, or pious frauds intended to impress on vulgar minds a higher reverence of the power and sanctity of Christ; will this in the least impeach the excellence of his religion, or the authority of its founder? or is
Christianity

Christianity answerable for all the fables of which it may have been the innocent occasion? The want of this obvious distinction has much injured the Christian cause; because on this ground it has ever been most successfully attacked, and on this ground it is not easily to be defended: for if the records of this revelation are supposed to be the revelation itself, the least defect discovered in them must be fatal to the whole. What has led many to overlook this distinction, is that common phrase, that the scriptures are the word of God; and in one sense they certainly are; that is, they are the sacred repository of all the revelations, dispensations, promises, and precepts, which God has vouchsafed to communicate to mankind; but by this expression we are not to understand, that every part of this voluminous collection of historical, poetical, prophetical, theological, and moral writings, which we call the Bible, was dictated by the immediate influence of divine inspiration: the authors of these books pretend to no such

infallibility, and if they claim it not for themselves, who has the authority to claim it for them? Christ required no such belief from those who were willing to be his disciples. He says, "He that believeth on me, hath everlasting life*;" but where does he say, He that believeth not every word contained in the Old Testament, which was then extant, or every word in the New Testament, which was to be wrote for the instruction of future generations, hath not everlasting life? There are innumerable occurrences related in the scriptures, some of greater, some of less, and some of no importance at all; the truth of which we can have no reason to question, but the belief of them is surely not essential to the faith of a Christian: I have no doubt but that St. Paul was shipwrecked, and that he left his cloak and his parchments at Troas; but the belief of these facts makes no part of Christianity, nor is the truth of them any proof of its authority. It proves only that this apostle could

* John vi. 47.

not in common life be under the perpetual influence of infallible inspiration; for, had he been so, he would not have put to sea before a storm, nor have forgot his cloak. These writers were undoubtedly directed by supernatural influence in all things necessary to the great work, which they were appointed to perform: At particular times, and on particular occasions, they were enabled to utter prophecies, to speak languages, and to work miracles; but in all other circumstances, they seem to have been left to the direction of their own understandings, like other men. In the sciences of history, geography, astronomy, and philosophy, they appear to have been no better instructed than others, and therefore were not less liable to be misled by the errors and prejudices of the times and countries in which they lived. They related facts like honest men, to the best of their knowledge or information, and they recorded the divine lessons of their master with the utmost fidelity; but they pretended to no infallibility, for they sometimes differed

in their relations, and they sometimes disagreed in their sentiments. All which proves only, that they did not act, or write, in a combination to deceive, but not in the least impeaches the truth of the revelation which they published; which depends not on any external evidence whatever: for I will venture to affirm, that if any one could prove, what is impossible to be proved, because it is not true, that there are errors in geography, chronology, and philosophy, in every page of the Bible; that the prophecies therein delivered are all but fortunate guesses, or artful applications, and the miracles there recorded no better than legendary tales: if any one could shew, that these books were never written by their pretended authors, but were posterior impositions on illiterate and credulous ages: all these wonderful discoveries would prove no more than this, that God, for reasons to us unknown, had thought proper to permit a revelation by him communicated to mankind, to be mixed with their ignorance, and corrupted by their
frauds

frauds from its earliest infancy, in the same manner in which he has visibly permitted it to be mixed, and corrupted from that period to the present hour. If in these books a religion superior to all human imagination actually exists, it is of no consequence to the proof of its divine origin, by what means it was there introduced, or with what human errors and imperfections it is blended. A diamond, though found in a bed of mud, is still a diamond, nor can the dirt, which surrounds it, depreciate its value or destroy its lustre.

To some speculative and refined observers, it has appeared incredible, that a wise and benevolent Creator should have constituted a world upon one plan, and a religion for it on another ; that is, that he should have revealed a religion to mankind, which not only contradicts the principal passions and inclinations which he has implanted in their natures, but is incompatible with the whole œconomy of that world which he has created, and in which he has thought proper to

place them. This, say they, with regard to the Christian is apparently the case: the love of power, riches, honour, and fame, are the great incitements to generous and magnanimous actions; yet by this institution are all these depreciated and discouraged. Government is essential to the nature of man, and cannot be managed without certain degrees of violence, corruption, and imposition; yet are all these strictly forbid. Nations cannot subsist without wars, nor war be carried on without rapine, desolation, and murder; yet are these prohibited under the severest threats. The non-resistance of evil must subject individuals to continual oppressions, and leave nations a defenceless prey to their enemies; yet is this recommended. Perpetual patience under insults and injuries must every day provoke new insults and new injuries; yet is this enjoined. A neglect of all we eat and drink and wear, must put an end to all commerce, manufactures, and industry; yet is this required. In short, were these precepts universally obeyed, the disposition

disposition of all human affairs must be entirely changed, and the business of the world, constituted as it now is, could not go on. To all this I answer, that such indeed is the Christian revelation, though some of its advocates may perhaps be unwilling to own it, and such it is constantly declared to be by him who gave it, as well as by those who published it under his immediate direction: To these he says, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you*." To the Jews he declares, "Ye are of this world; I am not of this world†." St. Paul writes to the Romans, "Be not conformed to this world‡;" and to the Corinthians, "We speak not the wisdom of this world§." St. James says, "Know ye not, that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a

* John xv. 19.

† John viii. 23.

‡ Rom. xii. 2.

§ 1 Cor. ii. 6.

“ friend of the world is the enemy of
 “ God*.” This irreconcilable disagreement between Christianity and the world is announced in numberless other places in the New Testament, and indeed by the whole tenour of those writings. These are plain declarations, which, in spite of all the evasions of those good managers, who choose to take a little of this world in their way to heaven, stand fixed and immoveable against all their arguments drawn from public benefit and pretended necessity, and must ever forbid any reconciliation between the pursuits of this world and the Christian institution: but they who reject it on this account, enter not into the sublime spirit of this religion, which is not a code of precise laws designed for the well-ordering society, adapted to the ends of worldly convenience, and amenable to the tribunal of human prudence; but a divine lesson of purity and perfection, so far superior to the low considerations of conquest, government, and

* Jam. iv. 4.

commerce,

commerce, that it takes no more notice of them, than of the battles of game-cocks, the policy of bees, or the industry of ants : they recollect not what is the first and principal object of this institution ; that this is not, as has been often repeated, to make us happy, or even virtuous in the present life, for the sake of augmenting our happiness here ; but to conduct us through a state of dangers and sufferings, of sin and temptation, in such a manner as to qualify us for the enjoyment of happiness hereafter. All other institutions of religion and morals were made for the world, but the characteristic of this is to be against it ; and therefore the merits of Christian doctrines are not to be weighed in the scales of public utility, like those of moral precepts, because worldly utility is not their end. If Christ and his apostles had pretended, that the religion which they preached would advance the power, wealth, and prosperity of nations, or of men, they would have deserved but little credit ; but they constantly profess the contrary, and

every where declare, that their religion is adverse to the world, and all its pursuits. Christ says, speaking of his disciples, " They " are not of the world, even as I am not of " the world *." It can therefore be no imputation on this religion, or on any of its precepts, that they tend not to an end which their author professedly disclaims : nor can it surely be deemed a defect, that it is adverse to the vain pursuits of this world ; for so are reason, wisdom, and experience ; they all teach us the same lesson, they all demonstrate to us every day, that these are begun on false hopes, carried on with disquietude, and end in disappointment. This professed incompatibility with the little, wretched, and iniquitous business of the world, is therefore so far from being a defect in this religion, that, was there no other proof of its divine origin, this alone, I think, would be abundantly sufficient. The great plan and benevolent design of this dispensation is plainly this ; to enlighten the minds, purify the reli-

* John xvii. 16.

gion, and amend the morals of mankind in general, and to select the most meritorious of them to be successively transplanted into the kingdom of heaven: which gracious offer is impartially tendered to all, who by perseverance in meekness, patience, piety, charity, and a detachment from the world, are willing to qualify themselves for this holy and happy society. Was this universally accepted, and did every man observe strictly every precept of the gospel, the face of human affairs and the œconomy of the world would indeed be greatly changed; but surely they would be changed for the better; and we should enjoy much more happiness, even here, than at present: for we must not forget, that evils are by it forbid as well as resistance; injuries, as well as revenge; all unwillingness to diffuse the enjoyments of life, as well as solicitude to acquire them; all obstacles to ambition, as well as ambition itself; and therefore all contentions for power and interest would be at an end; and the world would go on much more happily than

than it now does. But this universal acceptance of such an offer was never expected from so depraved and imperfect a creature as man, and therefore could never have been any part of the design: for it was foreknown and foretold by him who made it, that few, very few would accept it on these terms. He says, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth into life, and few there be that find it*." Accordingly we see, that very few are prevailed on, by the hopes of future happiness, to relinquish the pursuits of present pleasures or interests, and therefore these pursuits are little interrupted by the secession of so inconsiderable a number. As the natural world subsists by the struggles of the same elements, so does the moral by the contentions of the same passions, as from the beginning: the generality of mankind are actuated by the same motives, fight, scuffle, and scramble for power, riches, and pleasures with the same eagerness: all occupations and professions

* Matt. vii. 4.

are exercised with the same alacrity, and there are soldiers, lawyers, statesmen, patriots, and politicians, just as if Christianity had never existed. Thus we see this wonderful dispensation has answered all the purposes for which it was intended: it has enlightened the minds, purified the religion, and amended the morals of mankind; and, without subverting the constitution, policy, or business of the world, opened a gate, though a strait one, through which all, who are wise enough to choose it, and good enough to be fit for it, may find an entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

Others have said, that if this revelation had really been from God, his infinite power and goodness could never have suffered it to have been so soon perverted from its original purity, to have continued in a state of corruption through the course of so many ages, and at last to have proved so ineffectual to the reformation of mankind. To these I answer, that all this, on examination, will be found inevitable, from the nature of
all

all revelations communicated to so imperfect a creature as man, and from circumstances peculiar to the rise and progress of the Christian in particular : for when this was first preached to the gentile nations, though they were not able to withstand the force of its evidence, and therefore received it ; yet they could not be prevailed on to relinquish their old superstitions, and former opinions, but chose rather to incorporate them with it : by which means it was necessarily mixed with their ignorance, and their learning ; by both which it was equally injured. The people defaced its worship by blending it with their idolatrous ceremonies, and the philosophers corrupted its doctrines by weaving them up with the notions of the Gnostics, Mystics, and Manichæans, the prevailing systems of those times. By degrees its irresistible excellence gained over princes, potentates, and conquerors to its interests, and it was supported by their patronage : but that patronage soon engaged it in their policies and contests, and destroyed that excellence by
which

which it had been acquired. At length the meek and humble professors of the gospel enslaved these princes, and conquered these conquerors their patrons, and erected for themselves such a stupendous fabric of wealth and power, as the world had never seen : they then propagated their religion by the same methods, by which it had been persecuted ; nations were converted by fire and sword, and the vanquished were baptized with daggers at their throats. All these events we see proceed from a chain of causes and consequences, which could not have been broken without changing the established course of things by a constant series of miracles, or a total alteration of human nature : whilst that continues as it is, the purest religion must be corrupted by a conjunction with power and riches, and it will also then appear to be much more corrupted than it really is ; because many are inclined to think, that every deviation from its primitive state is a corruption. Christianity was at first preached by the poor and mean, in holes
and

and caverns, under the iron rod of perfection, and therefore many absurdly conclude, that any degree of wealth or power in its ministers, or of magnificence in its worship, are corruptions inconsistent with the genuine simplicity of its original state: they are offended, that modern bishops should possess titles, palaces, revenues, and coaches, when it is notorious, that their predecessors the apostles were despicable wanderers, without houses or money, and walked on foot. The apostles indeed lived in a state of poverty and persecution attendant on their particular situation, and the work which they had undertaken; this was their misfortune, but no part of their religion, and therefore it can be no more incumbent on their successors to imitate their poverty and meanness, than to be whipped, imprisoned, and put to death, in compliance with their example. These are all but the suggestions of envy and malevolence, but no objections to these fortunate alterations in Christianity and its professors; which,

which, if not abused to the purposes of tyranny and superstition, are in fact no more than the necessary and proper effects of its more prosperous situation. When a poor man grows rich, or a servant becomes a master, they should take care that their exaltation prompts them not to be unjust or insolent; but surely it is not requisite or right, that their behaviour and mode of living should be exactly the same, when their situation is altered. How far this institution has been effectual to the reformation of mankind, it is not easy now to ascertain, because the enormities which prevailed before the appearance of it are by time so far removed from our sight, that they are scarcely visible; but those of the most gigantic size still remain in the records of history, as monuments of the rest: Wars in those ages were carried on with a ferocity and cruelty unknown to the present: whole cities and nations were extirpated by fire and sword; and thousands of the vanquished were crucified and impaled for having endeavoured only

to defend themselves and their country. The lives of new-born infants were then intirely at the disposal of their parents, who were at liberty to bring them up, or to expose them to perish by cold and hunger, or to be devoured by birds and beasts ; and this was frequently practised without punishment, and even without censure. Gladiators were employed by hundreds to cut one another to pieces in public theatres for the diversion of the most polite assemblies ; and though these combatants at first consisted of criminals only, by degrees men of the highest rank, and even ladies of the most illustrious families, enrolled themselves in this honourable list. On many occasions human sacrifices were ordained ; and at the funerals of rich and eminent persons, great numbers of their slaves were murdered as victims pleasing to their departed spirits. The most infamous obscenities were made part of their religious worship, and the most unnatural lusts publicly avowed, and celebrated by their most admired poets. At the approach of Christianity

tianity all these horrid abominations vanished; and amongst those who first embraced it, scarce a single vice was to be found: to such an amazing degree of piety, charity, temperance, patience, and resignation were the primitive converts exalted, that they seem literally to have been regenerated, and purified from all the imperfections of human nature; and to have pursued such a constant and uniform course of devotion, innocence, and virtue, as, in the present times, it is almost as difficult for us to conceive as to imitate. If it is asked, why should not the belief of the same religion now produce the same effects? the answer is short, because it is not believed: The most sovereign medicine can perform no cure, if the patient will not be persuaded to take it. Yet notwithstanding all impediments, it has certainly done a great deal towards diminishing the vices and correcting the dispositions of mankind; and was it universally adopted in belief and practice, would totally eradicate both sin and punishment. But this was ne-

ver expected, or designed, or possible, because, if their existence did not arise from some necessity to us unknown, they never would have been permitted to exist at all ; and therefore they can no more be extirpated, than they could have been prevented : for this would certainly be incompatible with the frame and constitution of this world, and in all probability with that of another. And this, I think, well accounts for that reserve and obscurity with which this religion was at first promulgated, and that want of irresistible evidence of its truth, by which it might possibly have been enforced. Christ says to his disciples, “ To you it is given to
 “ know the mystery of the kingdom of God ;
 “ but unto them that are without, all these
 “ things are done in parables ; that seeing
 “ they may see, and not perceive, and hearing
 “ they may hear, and not understand ;
 “ lest at any time they should be converted,
 “ and their sins should be forgiven them *.”
 That is, to you by peculiar favour it is given

* Mark iv. 11, 12.

to know and understand the doctrines of my religion, and by that means to qualify yourselves for the kingdom of heaven ; but to the multitude without, that is to all mankind in general, this indulgence cannot be extended ; because that all men should be exempted from sin and punishment is utterly repugnant to the universal system, and that constitution of things, which infinite wisdom has thought proper to adopt.

Objections have likewise been raised to the divine authority of this religion from the incredibility of some of its doctrines, particularly of those concerning the Trinity, and atonement for sin by the sufferings and death of Christ ; the one contradicting all the principles of human reason, and the other all our ideas of divine justice. To these objections I shall only say, that no arguments founded on principles, which we cannot comprehend, can possibly disprove a proposition already proved on principles which we do understand ; and therefore that on this subject they ought not to be attended to :

That three Beings should be one Being, is a proposition which certainly contradicts reason, that is, *our* reason ; but it does not from thence follow, that it cannot be true ; for there are many propositions which contradict our reason, and yet are demonstrably true : one is the very first principle of all religion, the being of a God ; for that any thing should exist without a cause, or that any thing should be the cause of its own existence, are propositions equally contradictory to our reason ; yet one of them must be true, or nothing could ever have existed : in like manner the over-ruling grace of the Creator, and the free-will of his creatures, his certain fore-knowledge of future events, and the uncertain contingency of those events, are to our apprehensions absolute contradictions to each other ; and yet the truth of every one of these is demonstrable from Scripture, reason, and experience. All these difficulties arise from our imagining, that the mode of existence of all Beings must be similar to our own ; that is, that they must

must all exist in time, and space ; and hence proceeds our embarrassment on this subject. We know, that no two Beings, with whose mode of existence we are acquainted, can exist in the same point of time, in the same point of space, and that therefore they cannot be one : but how far Beings, whose mode of existence bears no relation to time or space, may be united, we cannot comprehend : and therefore the possibility of such an union we cannot positively deny. In like manner our reason informs us, that the punishment of the innocent, instead of the guilty, is diametrically opposite to justice, rectitude, and all pretensions to utility ; but we should also remember, that the short line of our reason cannot reach to the bottom of this question : it cannot inform us, by what means either guilt or punishment ever gained a place in the works of a Creator infinitely good and powerful, whose goodness must have induced him, and whose power must have enabled him, to exclude them : It cannot assure us, that some sufferings of individuals are not necessary to

the happiness and well-being of the whole : It cannot convince us, that they do not actually arise from this necessity, or that, for this cause, they may not be required of us, and levied like a tax for the public benefit ; or that this tax may not be paid by one Being, as well as another ; and therefore, if voluntarily offered, be justly accepted from the innocent instead of the guilty. Of all these circumstances we are totally ignorant ; nor can our reason afford us any information, and therefore we are not able to assert, that this measure is contrary to justice, or void of utility : for, unless we could first resolve that great question, Whence came evil ? we can decide nothing on the dispensations of Providence ; because they must necessarily be connected with that undiscoverable principle ; and, as we know not the root of the disease, we cannot judge of what is, or is not, a proper and effectual remedy. It is remarkable, that, notwithstanding all the seeming absurdities of this doctrine, there is one circumstance much in its favour ; which
is,

is, that it has been universally adopted in all ages, as far as history can carry us back in our inquiries to the earliest times ; in which we find all nations, civilized and barbarous, however differing in all other religious opinions, agreeing alone in the expediency of appeasing their offended Deities by sacrifices, that is, by the vicarious sufferings of men or other animals. This notion could never have been derived from reason, because it directly contradicts it ; nor from ignorance, because ignorance could never have contrived so unaccountable an expedient, nor have been uniform in all ages and countries in any opinion whatsoever ; nor from the artifice of kings or priests, in order to acquire dominion over the people, because it seems not adapted to this end ; and we find it implanted in the minds of the most remote savages at this day discovered, who have neither kings or priests, artifice or dominion, amongst them. It must therefore be derived from natural instinct or supernatural revelation, both which are equally the operations

rations of divine power. If it is further urged, that however true these doctrines may be, yet it must be inconsistent with the justice and goodness of the Creator, to require from his creatures the belief of propositions which contradict, or are above the reach of that reason, which he has thought proper to bestow upon them. To this I answer, that genuine Christianity requires no such belief: It has discovered to us many important truths, with which we were before intirely unacquainted; and amongst them are these: that three Beings are some way united in the divine essence; and that God will accept of the sufferings of Christ as an atonement for the sins of mankind. These, considered as declarations of facts only, neither contradict, or are above the reach of human reason: The first is a proposition as plain, as that three equilateral lines compose one triangle; the other is as intelligible, as that one man should discharge the debts of another. In what manner this union is formed, or why God accepts these vicarious punishments,

nishments, or to what purposes they may be subservient, it informs us not, because no information could enable us to comprehend these mysteries ; and therefore it does not require that we should know or believe any thing about them. The truth of these doctrines must rest intirely on the authority of those who taught them ; but then we should reflect that those were the same persons who taught us a system of religion more sublime, and of ethics more perfect, than any which our faculties were ever able to discover, but which when discovered are exactly consonant to our reason ; and that therefore we should not hastily reject those informations which they have vouchsafed to give us, of which our reason is not a competent judge. If an able mathematician proves to us the truth of several propositions by demonstrations which we understand, we hesitate not on his authority to assent to others, the process of whose proofs we are not able to follow : why therefore should we refuse that credit to Christ
and

and his Apostles, which we think reasonable to give to one another ?

Many have objected to the whole scheme of this revelation, as partial, fluctuating, indeterminate, unjust, and unworthy of an omniscient and omnipotent author, who cannot be supposed to have favoured particular persons, countries, and times, with this divine communication, while others no less meritorious have been altogether excluded from its benefits ; nor to have changed and counteracted his own designs ; that is, to have formed mankind able and disposed to render themselves miserable by their own wickedness, and then to have contrived so strange an expedient to restore them to that happiness which they need never have been permitted to forfeit ; and this to be brought about by the unnecessary interposition of a mediator. To all this I shall only say, that however unaccountable this may appear to us, who see but as small a part of the Christian, as of the universal plan of creation, they are both in regard to all these circumstances exactly analogous

logous to each other. In all the dispensations of Providence, with which we are acquainted, benefits are distributed in a similar manner ; health and strength, sense and science, wealth and power, are all bestowed on individuals and communities in different degrees and at different times. The whole œconomy of this world consists of evils and remedies ; and these for the most part administered by the instrumentality of intermediate agents. God has permitted us to plunge ourselves into poverty, distress, and misery, by our own vices, and has afforded us the advice, instructions, and examples of others, to deter or extricate us from these calamities. He has formed us subject to innumerable diseases, and he has bestowed on us a variety of remedies. He has made us liable to hunger, thirst, and nakedness, and he supplies us with food, drink, and clothing, usually by the administration of others. He has created poisons, and he has provided antidotes. He has ordained the winter's cold to cure the pestilential heats of the summer, and the summer's sunshine to dry up the inundations of the winter.

winter. Why the constitution of nature is so formed, why all the visible dispensations of Providence are such, and why such is the Christian dispensation also, we know not, nor have faculties to comprehend. God might certainly have made the material world a system of perfect beauty and regularity, without evils, and without remedies ; and the Christian dispensation a scheme only of moral virtue, productive of happiness, without the intervention of any atonement or mediation. He might have exempted our bodies from all diseases, and our minds from all depravity, and we should then have stood in no need of medicines to restore us to health, or expedients to reconcile us to his favour. It seems indeed to our ignorance, that this would have been more consistent with justice and reason ; but his infinite wisdom has decided in another manner, and formed the systems both of Nature and Christianity on other principles ; and these so exactly similar, that we have cause to conclude that they both must proceed

ceed from the same source of divine power and wisdom, however inconsistent with our reason they may appear. Reason is undoubtedly our surest guide in all matters, which lie within the narrow circle of her intelligence: On the subject of revelation her province is only to examine into its authority; and when that is once proved, she has no more to do, but to acquiesce in its doctrines; and therefore is never so ill employed, as when she pretends to accommodate them to her own ideas of rectitude and truth. God, says this self-sufficient teacher, is perfectly wise, just, and good; and what is the inference? That all his dispensations must be conformable to our notions of perfect wisdom, justice, and goodness: but it should first be proved, that man is as perfect, and as wise as his Creator, or this consequence will by no means follow; but rather the reverse, that is, that the dispensations of a perfect and all-wise Being must probably appear unreasonable, and perhaps unjust, to a Being imperfect and ignorant; and therefore their
seeming

seeming impossibility may be a mark of their truth, and in some measure justify that pious rant of a mad enthusiast, "Credo, quia impossibile." Nor is it the least surprising, that we are not able to understand the spiritual dispensations of the Almighty, when his material works are to us no less incomprehensible; our reason can afford us no insight into those great properties of matter, gravitation, attraction, elasticity, and electricity, nor even into the essence of matter itself: Can reason teach us now the sun's luminous orb can fill a circle, whose diameter contains many millions of miles, with a constant inundation of successive rays, during thousands of years, without any perceivable diminution of that body, from whence they are continually poured, or any augmentation of those bodies on which they fall, and by which they are constantly absorbed? Can reason tell us how those rays, darted with a velocity greater than that of a cannon-ball, can strike the tenderest organs of the human frame without inflicting any degree of pain,

or

or by what means this percussión only can convey the forms of distant objects to an immaterial mind? or how any union can be formed between material and immaterial essences, or how the wounds of the body can give pain to the soul, or the anxiety of the soul can emaciate and destroy the body? That all these things are so, we have visible and indisputable demonstration; but how they can be so, is to us as incomprehensible, as the most abstruse mysteries of revelation can possibly be. In short, we see so small a part of the great whole; we know so little of the relation, which the present life bears to pre-existent and future states; we can conceive so little of the nature of God, and his attributes, or mode of existence; we can comprehend so little of the material, and so much less of the moral plan on which the universe is constituted, or on what principle it proceeds, that, if a revelation from such a being, on such subjects, was in every part familiar to our understandings, and consonant to our reason, we should have great

seeming impossibility may be a mark of their truth, and in some measure justify that pious rant of a mad enthusiast, "Credo, quia impossibile." Nor is it the least surprising, that we are not able to understand the spiritual dispensations of the Almighty, when his material works are to us no less incomprehensible; our reason can afford us no insight into those great properties of matter, gravitation, attraction, elasticity, and electricity, nor even into the essence of matter itself: Can reason teach us now the sun's luminous orb can fill a circle, whose diameter contains many millions of miles, with a constant inundation of successive rays, during thousands of years, without any perceivable diminution of that body, from whence they are continually poured, or any augmentation of those bodies on which they fall, and by which they are constantly absorbed? Can reason tell us how those rays, darted with a velocity greater than that of a cannon-ball, can strike the tenderest organs of the human frame without inflicting any degree of pain,

or

or by what means this percussio only can convey the forms of distant objects to an immaterial mind? or how any union can be formed between material and immaterial essences, or how the wounds of the body can give pain to the soul, or the anxiety of the soul can emaciate and destroy the body? That all these things are so, we have visible and indisputable demonstration; but how they can be so, is to us as incomprehensible, as the most abstruse mysteries of revelation can possibly be. In short, we see so small a part of the great whole; we know so little of the relation, which the present life bears to pre-existent and future states; we can conceive so little of the nature of God, and his attributes, or mode of existence; we can comprehend so little of the material, and so much less of the moral plan on which the universe is constituted, or on what principle it proceeds, that, if a revelation from such a being, on such subjects, was in every part familiar to our understandings, and consonant to our reason, we should have great

cause to suspect its divine authority ; and therefore, had this revelation been less incomprehensible, it would certainly have been more incredible.

But I shall not enter further into the consideration of these abstruse and difficult speculations, because the discussion of them would render this short essay too tedious and laborious a task for the perusal of them, for whom it was principally intended ; which are all those busy or idle persons, whose time and thoughts are wholly engrossed by the pursuits of business or pleasure, ambition or luxury, who know nothing of this religion, except what they have accidentally picked up by desultory conversation or superficial reading, and have thence determined with themselves, that a pretended revelation, founded on so strange and improbable a story, so contradictory to reason, so adverse to the world and all its occupations, so incredible in its doctrines, and in its precepts so impracticable, can be nothing more than the imposition of priestcraft upon ignorant

and illiterate ages, and artfully continued as an engine well adapted to awe and govern the superstitious vulgar. To talk to such about the Christian religion, is to converse with the deaf concerning music, or with the blind on the beauties of painting: they want all ideas relative to the subject, and therefore can never be made to comprehend it: to enable them to do this, their minds must be formed for these conceptions by contemplation, retirement, and abstraction from business and dissipation; by ill-health, disappointments, and distresses; and possibly by divine interposition, or by enthusiasm, which is usually mistaken for it. Without some of these preparatory aids, together with a competent degree of learning and application, it is impossible that they can think or know, understand or believe, any thing about it. If they profess to believe, they deceive others; if they fancy that they believe, they deceive themselves. I am ready to acknowledge, that these gentlemen, as far as their information reaches, are perfectly in

the right ; and if they are endued with good understandings, which have been intirely devoted to the business or amusements of the world, they can pass no other judgment, and must revolt from the history and doctrines of this religion. “ The preaching Christ crucified was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness * ;” and so it must appear to all, who, like them, judge from established prejudices, false learning, and superficial knowledge ; for those who are quite unable to follow the chain of its prophecy, to see the beauty and justness of its moral precepts, and to enter into the wonders of its dispensations, can form no other idea of this revelation, but that of a confused rhapsody of fictions and absurdities.

If it is asked, Was Christianity then intended only for learned divines and profound philosophers ? I answer, No : it was at first preached by the illiterate, and received by the ignorant ; and to such are the

* 1 Cor. i. 26.

practical,

practical, which are the most necessary parts of it sufficiently intelligible : but the proofs of its authority undoubtedly are not, because these must be chiefly drawn from other parts, of a speculative nature, opening to our inquiries inexhaustible discoveries concerning the nature, attributes, and dispensations of God, which cannot be understood without some learning and much attention. From these the generality of mankind must necessarily be excluded, and must therefore trust to others for the grounds of their belief, if they believe at all. And hence perhaps it is, that faith, or easiness of belief, is so frequently and so strongly recommended in the gospel ; because if men require proofs, of which they themselves are incapable, and those who have no knowledge on this important subject will not place some confidence in those who have ; the illiterate and unattentive must ever continue in a state of unbelief : but then all such should remember, that in all sciences, even in mathematics themselves, there are many propositions, which on a

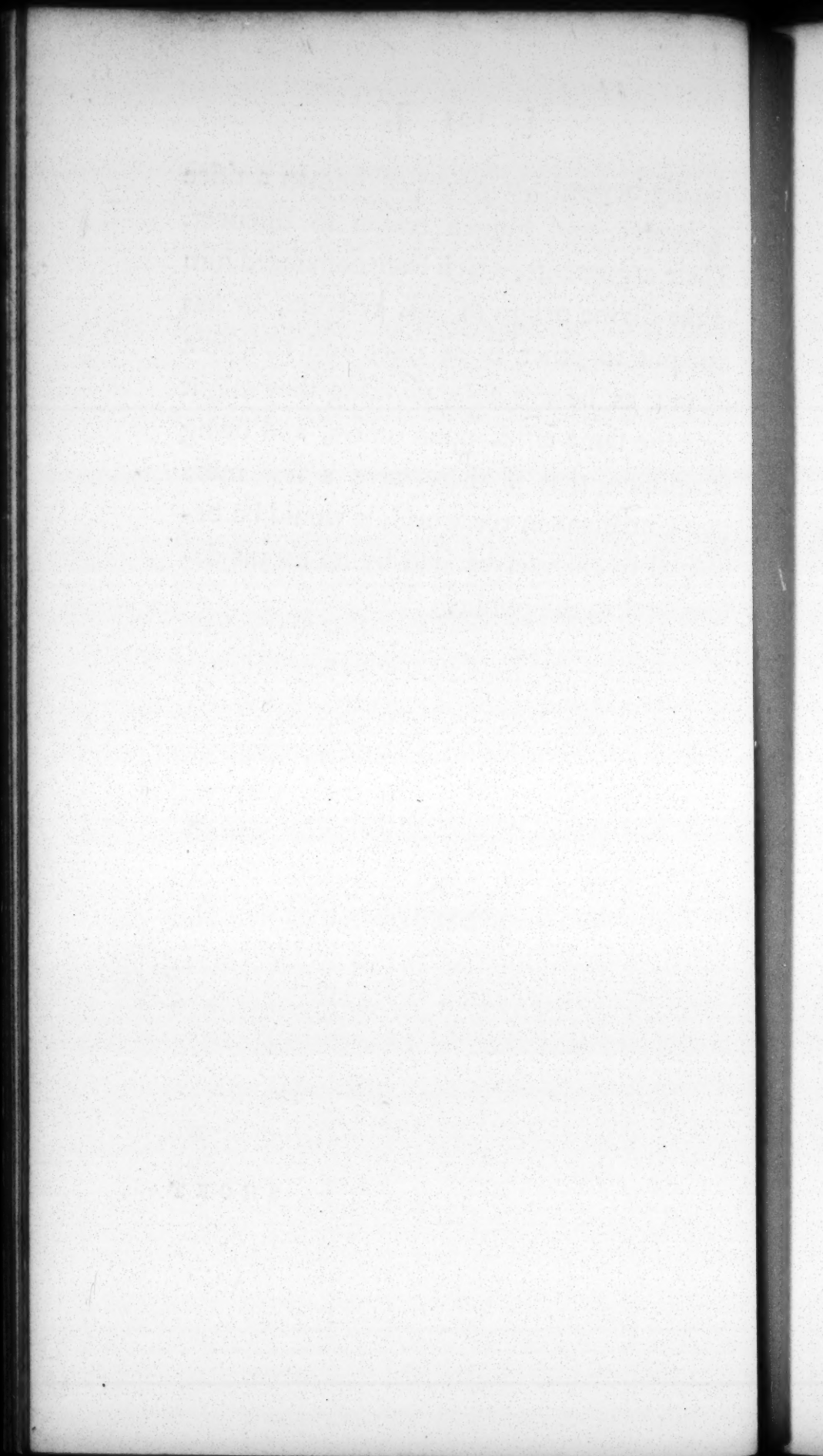
cursory view appear to the most acute understandings, uninstructed in that science, to be impossible to be true, which yet on a closer examination are found to be truths capable of the strictest demonstration; and that therefore, in disquisitions on which we cannot determine without much learned investigation, reason uninformed is by no means to be depended on; and from hence they ought surely to conclude, that it may be at least as possible for them to be mistaken in disbelieving this revelation, who know nothing of the matter, as for those great masters of reason and erudition, Grotius, Bacon, Newton, Boyle, Locke, Addison, and Lyttelton, to be deceived in their belief: a belief, to which they firmly adhered after the most diligent and learned researches into the authenticity of its records, the completion of the prophecies, the sublimity of its doctrines, the purity of its precepts, and the arguments of its adversaries; a belief, which they have testified to the world by their writings, without any other motive,

than

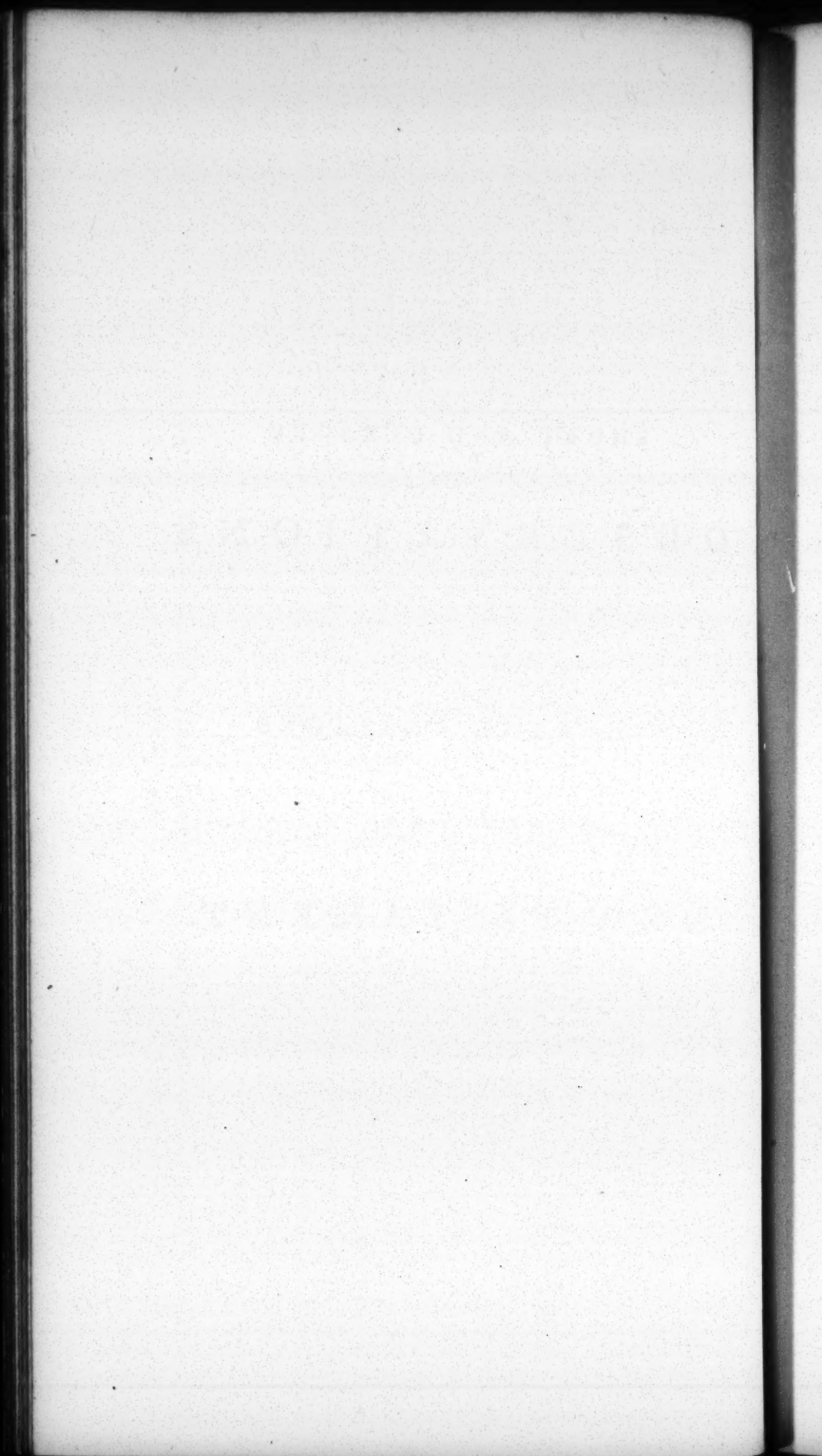
than their regard for truth and the benefit of mankind. Should the few foregoing pages add but one mite to the treasures with which these learned writers have enriched the world ; if they should be so fortunate as to persuade any of these minute philosophers to place some confidence in these great opinions, and to distrust their own ; if they should be able to convince them, that notwithstanding all unfavourable appearances, Christianity may not be altogether artifice and error ; if they should prevail on them to examine it with some attention, or, if that is too much trouble, not to reject it without any examination at all ; the purpose of this little work will be sufficiently answered. Had the arguments herein used, and the new hints here flung out, been more largely discussed, it might easily have been extended to a more considerable bulk ; but then the busy would not have had leisure, nor the idle inclination to have read it. Should it ever have the honour to be admitted into such good

company, they will immediately, I know, determine, that it must be the work of some enthusiast or methodist, some beggar, or some madman. I shall therefore beg leave to assure them, that the author is very far removed from all these characters: that he once perhaps believed as little as themselves; but having some leisure and more curiosity, he employed them both in resolving a question which seemed to him of some importance—Whether Christianity was really an imposture founded on an absurd, incredible, and obsolete fable, as many suppose it? Or whether it is, what it pretends to be, a revelation communicated to mankind by the interposition of supernatural power? On a candid enquiry, he soon found, that the first was an absolute impossibility, and that its pretensions to the latter were founded on the most solid grounds: in the further pursuit of his examination, he perceived, at every step, new lights arising, and some of the brightest from parts of it the most obscure, but productive of the clearest proofs, because
equally

equally beyond the power of human artifice to invent, and human reason to discover. These arguments, which have convinced him of the divine origin of this religion, he has here put together in as clear and concise a manner as he was able, thinking they might have the same effect upon others, and being of opinion, that if there were a few more true Christians in the world, it would be beneficial to themselves, and by no means detrimental to the public.



SHORT AND CURSORY
OBSERVATIONS
ON
SEVERAL PASSAGES
IN THE
NEW TESTAMENT.



CURSORY OBSERVATIONS.

MATT. V. 3.

Μακάριοι οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι, ὅτι αὐτοὶ
ἐσὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν ἑρραίων.

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the
kingdom of heaven.*

IN this declaration of Christ, two questions offer themselves to our consideration: 1st, Who are the poor in spirit?—And 2d, What is the kingdom of heaven?

By the poor in spirit are here meant, those who, by their natural dispositions, are meek, quiet, teachable, and submissive; or those who, by reflection and cultivation, have rendered their dispositions such, and have eradicated from their hearts pride, envy, and ambition, those high-spirited passions, so destructive of the happiness of society, as well as of their own. What portion of mankind comes

comes under this description is known only to the searcher of all hearts; but we may reasonably conclude, that neither heroes, conquerors, or any of those whom the world dignifies with the titles of great men, can be of the number.

By the kingdom of heaven is here to be understood, that celestial community of the spirits* of just men made perfect, over which God more immediately presides, and which is therefore sometimes called the kingdom of God; in which there are no wars, factions, struggles, or contentions, but all is benevolence, peace, concord, and subordination: a kingdom frequently hung out to our view in the New Testament, of which we are promised to be made subjects in a future life, provided we shall be properly qualified for it by our behaviour in the present.

To select the most excellent of mankind, and to qualify them for admission into this holy and happy society, seems to be the chief object of the Christian dispensation.

* Heb. xii. 23.

What that qualification must be, we are sufficiently informed by the author of it— Calling to him little children, he says, “ Of such is the kingdom of God ;” and again, “ Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein *.” It is also evident from the nature of this community, that none but the poor in spirit can be admitted ; because, were the proud, factious, turbulent, and ambitious to find entrance, they would immediately destroy that tranquillity and happiness with which it is blessed ; and this kingdom, though not of this world, would soon become exactly similar to those which are.

It is said, “ Many are called, but few are chosen ;” but we are not therefore to conclude, that all who are not chosen are to be consigned to a state of misery ; many who are deficient in this necessary qualification, and therefore inadmissible into this state of purity and perfection, may deserve no greater punish-

* Mark x. 14, 15.

ment than the loss of so inestimable an acquisition; and some perhaps may have virtues which may entitle them to rewards of an inferior kind. Mankind are by no means divisible into two classes only—the righteous and the wicked. We find them indeed so divided in many passages of the New Testament, all which must be understood but as general declarations, that the righteous shall be rewarded, and the wicked punished, in a future life; but cannot be applied to individuals, because in fact no such line of distinction can be drawn between them. The generality of mankind are compleatly neither the one or the other: none are so good as to be guilty of no crimes, and few so bad as to be possessed of no virtues; and in most men they are intermixed, though in very different proportions. The justice of Providence must have prepared many intermediate states of happiness and misery, in which every individual will receive reward or punishment in exact proportion to his merits. Astronomy has opened to our view
innumerable

innumerable worlds, some of which are probably happier, and some more miserable than this which we at present inhabit ; in them there is ample room for the display of the divine justice and benevolence, as in some of them such a situation may be allotted to every one as his conduct has deserved.

MATT. V. 5.

Μακάριοι οἱ πραεῖς, ὅτι αὐτοὶ κληρονομήσουσι
τὴν γῆν.

*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the
earth.*

IT appears by no means easy to reconcile the promise with facts and experience; for earthly prosperity, wealth, power, and pre-eminence, are so far from being the inheritance of the meek, that they seem to be entirely monopolized by the bold, turbulent, and ambitious; and we may say with Cato, This world was made for Cæsar.

To extricate themselves from this difficulty, some commentators have been induced to look out for another earth, which they at last fortunately found in the words of St. Peter; who says, “ Nevertheless we, according to promise, look for new heavens
“ and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness*.” To this new earth, they would

* 2 Pet. iii. 13.

persuade

persuade us, this promise may with propriety be applied, and that therein it will certainly be fulfilled.

But in explaining this passage, there is no occasion to have recourse to so far-fetched and fanciful an interpretation, nor to call in the assistance of a new world. By the meek inheriting the earth, nothing more is meant, than that persons of meek, quiet, and peaceable dispositions, enjoy more happiness on earth, and suffer less disquietude in the present life, than those of opposite characters: and this is verified by the experience of every day; they acquire more friends, and fewer enemies, they meet with fewer injuries and disappointments, and bear those which they cannot avoid with less uneasiness, and pass thro' the world as they do through a crowd, less obstructed, less bruised and jostled, than those who force their way by violence and impetuosity. To which we may add, that a meek and quiet temper is the most efficacious preservative of health, the first of all earthly blessings, and without which we are incapa-

ble of enjoying any other. Wealth, power, and grandeur, are by no means essential to earthly happiness; but should we admit that they are, and are included in this promise, we should not find it altogether unfulfilled; for, though the turbulent and overbearing may sometimes seize on them by violence, they much oftener fail in their attempts, and sink by their own insolence into ruin and contempt; whilst those of easy and conciliating manners, silently climb above them, less envied, and less opposed, because less noticed and less offending.

It is universally allowed, that nothing so much advances our worldly interests, and so much assists us in our pursuits of wealth and honours, as good-breeding; and what is good-breeding, but an affectation of meekness, humility, and complacency? if, therefore, the pretence to these amiable qualities can do so much, surely the possession of them will do a great deal more. In fact it does, and seldom fails to gain us favour, increase our friends, and advance our interests.—Thus

we

we see this promise is generally accomplished; the meek do inherit the earth, that is, have the best chance of acquiring and enjoying the blessings of this life, as well as the happiness of another.

M A T T. V. 7.

Μακαριοι οἱ ἐλεημονες, ὅτι αὐτοὶ ἐλεηθ-
σονται.

*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain
mercy.*

CRUELTY is the most unpardonable of all crimes, because it is without temptation, and therefore without excuse. Mercy is the most amiable attribute of God; and a virtue most becoming the situation of man, because the sins which he perpetually commits, and the dangers with which he is constantly surrounded, oblige him to stand in need of it every hour: it is peculiarly congenial to the benevolent spirit of the Christian religion, and as such is here enforced by the Author of it, in this short but emphatical declaration; in which it is remarkable, that we find nothing which limits our exercise of this amiable virtue within any bounds, or confines it to any description;

tion; not to our relations, our friends, our neighbours, our countrymen, nor even to mankind: from whence we may reasonably conclude, that he requires us to extend it to every thing that has life and sensibility. The words seem to regard more the disposition of the actor than the object on which it is exerted: "Blessed are the merciful," that is, those who are of a tender and compassionate temper, who feel for the miseries of every thing that has life, and endeavour all in their power to relieve them. Whoever, therefore, can wantonly inflict pain on the meanest animal, or receive a diabolical pleasure from its sufferings, can have no claim to this blessing, nor to obtain that mercy to which he is a stranger.

M A T T. VI. 16.

Ὅταν δὲ νηστεύητε, μὴ γίνεσθε ὡς περ οἱ ὑποκρίται.

Moreover, when ye fast, be not as the hypocrites.

JESUS Christ having been born and educated under the Jewish institution, complied with all the ceremonies and customs of that law, and required none of his disciples to relinquish them, in order to receive the religion which he came to teach. Among these, fasting at particular seasons was one, which was commanded by their law, observed by all, and particularly by the Pharisees, with superstitious rigour and hypocritical ostentation; which he here with some asperity reprehends. He reproves them, not for fasting, the use of which, as well as that of all the rest of their religious rites, he approved and encouraged; but it is observable, that in these words there is nothing

nothing which requires it ; taking it for granted, that they would fast in obedience to their law, he only says, “ When ye fast, be “ not as the hypocrites ;” and then proceeds to instruct them how to perform this duty in a proper manner : but does not command them to perform it at all.

This silence of their master, on a subject which they thought so important, induced many of the Jews, who had become his disciples, to excuse themselves from complying with this unpleasant ceremony ; as is evident from the question put to him by the disciples of John the Baptist, who said, “ Why do we “ and the Pharisees fast often *, but thy disciples fast not ?” From hence it appears plainly, that though Christ observed this, as well as all the ceremonies of the Mosaic law, it was no part of his institution, nor was enjoined by him as a Christian, or a moral duty. This indeed, and every other mode of self-punishment, are so opposite to the benevolent spirit of the religion which he

* Matt. ix. 14.

taught,

taught, that it is impossible they can make a part of it. Christianity requires us to make every one as happy as we are able, to relieve the poor, visit the sick, and comfort the distressed; but if every man was obliged to inflict sufferings upon himself, instead of excluding misery at every avenue, as we are benevolently commanded, we should introduce as much as if every man was permitted to injure and torment his neighbour. There are many precepts in the New Testament, which require us to suffer with fortitude and resignation, for righteousness sake, for truth, for our religion, or the benefit of mankind; but we find none which enjoin sufferings for their own sake, or represent them as meritorious in themselves. St. Peter exhorts his disciples to suffer patiently for these great ends, “because
 “Christ also suffered for them, leaving us an
 “example that we should follow his steps*,” but he does not advise us to suffer for no end at all.

* 1 Pet. ii. 21.

Fasting, with all the rest of their religious rites, are continued to the Jews after their conversion to Christianity, but were never imposed on the profelytes of any other nation; from whence it is evident, that Christ never intended by the gospel to abolish the Mosaic law, with regard to the Jews, nor to extend it to any other people. Hence arises that remarkable difference, which cannot escape our notice, between the religion of Christ and that of his Apostles, and particularly of St. Paul; a difference so great, that, if we attend not to the cause of it, we must consider them as two religious institutions contradictory to each other. Christ commands his disciples to perform the most minute ceremonies of the Jewish law, to pay tithes even of mint, anniseed, and cummin *; St. Paul represents the most important, as useless and insignificant, and says, "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping the commandments of God †." The cause is sufficiently evident:

* Matt. xxiii. 23.

† 1 Cor. vii. 19.

Christ

Christ preached to the Jews, and therefore his religion is founded on and incorporated with theirs, which he did not require them to relinquish, in order to accept it, and assures them, that he did not come "to destroy" their law, but to fulfil it." St. Paul preached chiefly to the Gentiles, but was not commissioned to convert them to Judaism, in order to their becoming Christians; and therefore we do not find that he, or any of the Apostles, imposed the observance of fasts, or any other ceremonials of the Mosaic law, on their Gentile profelytes.

M A T T. X. 29.

Οὐχι δύο σκεθια ἀσσαριε πωλεῖται, καὶ ἐν
 ἑξ αὐτῶν ἓ πεσεῖται ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν, ἀνευ τοῦ πα-
 τρός ὑμῶν.

*Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing?
 And one of these shall not fall to the ground
 without your heavenly Father.*

MANY have been the controversies
 amongst philosophers, in all times,
 concerning a general and a particular Pro-
 vidence. Some have been of opinion, that
 the great Creator of all things so framed
 the universal system, that every part of it is
 carried on by a regular process of causes and
 consequences, without his farther interpofi-
 tion; and that he cannot interpose, without
 changing the course of nature by a miracu-
 lous act of divine power, which he rarely, if
 ever, thinks proper to exert: that both the
 material and moral world are governed by
 general laws, which cannot be suspended for
 the

the sake of individuals, who must therefore submit to this necessity, though rewards and punishments are not always distributed in the present life in proportion to their merits; and that a machine so constituted is a more conspicuous instance of infinite wisdom and power, than the one which stands in need of the continual interference of its author, for regulation and support.—Others have thought, that God not only created the world, but perpetually sustains, invigorates, and directs every part of it; and that, if this energy of divine power was withdrawn but for a moment, the whole would instantly be annihilated.—The latter is undoubtedly the truth, and is confirmed by reason, scripture, and experience. Reason teaches us that the revolutions of the vast and innumerable celestial orbs, through immense spaces, or the delicate movements in animal and vegetable bodies, can never possibly be performed by any principles originally impressed on matter by attraction, cohesion, elasticity, or electricity; because they act in
contradiction

contradiction to them all : and therefore they must be effected by the continual direction of some omnipotent hand : it assures us, that the moral, as well as the material world, must be under the continual influence of the same power ; because, without it, the great designs of Providence could never be accomplished. The most important events in life are derived from the operations of matter and will—peace and war, plenty and famine, our health and diseases, our happiness and misery, our safety and destruction. No plan, therefore, could be pursued, if these were all left to the blind movement of the one, or the capricious elections of the other ; but, happily for us, they are both under the controul of an omniscient and omnipotent governor, who dispenses them as seems best to his infinite wisdom ; and this he can do by a perpetual though invisible influence, without the expence of any miracle ; for, if his interference in any event constitutes a miracle, every event is a miracle in nature, because there can be no event without it.

The whole tenour of the scriptures implies
 5 the

the constant superintendency of the Creator over all his works, his continual attention to the most inconsiderable, as well as to the most important events, to the fall of a sparrow and to the fall of an empire, to ourselves, our behaviour, our happiness and sufferings, our enjoyments, and our wants; these are all represented as the effects of his will, and therefore the objects of his knowledge and his care; and on this principle we are every where enjoined to love him, to fear him, to praise him, to adore him, to obey his commands, to implore his forgiveness, to thank him for his mercy, and to deprecate his wrath.

Experience teaches us the same lesson; and a man must be possessed of very little observation, and less faith, who does not recollect daily instances of the apparent interposition of Providence in the detection of crimes, the punishment of guilt, and the protection of innocence, which fall within the circle of his own knowledge, and are recorded in the most authentic histories of all ages.

M A T T.

M A T T. X. 34, 35.

Μη νομισητε ὅτι ἦλθον βαλεῖν εἰρηνὴν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν· ἐκ ἦλθον βαλεῖν εἰρηνὴν, ἀλλὰ μαχαίραν.

Ἦλθον γὰρ διχάσαι ἄνθρωπον κατὰ τὰ πα-
τρὸς αὐτοῦ, καὶ θυγατέρα κατὰ τῆς μητρὸς αὐ-
τοῦ, καὶ νυμφὴν κατὰ τῆς πενθερᾶς αὐτοῦ.

Think not that I am to come to send peace on earth ; I came not to send peace, but a sword.

For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.

THIS prophecy of Christ was soon compleated and dreadfully fulfilled, particularly in that city, and amongst that people to whom it was spoken ; for the Jews were so far from accepting that pacific and benevolent religion which he taught, that they perverted it into a new cause of increasing those national contentions and private ani-

mosities in which they were then universally involved, and were justly punished for their enormous wickedness, obstinacy, and incredulity, by the swords of their enemies and their own, with such calamities as are unexampled in the history of mankind. This is an undisputed fact; but how is it reconcilable with his frequent declarations on other occasions, and the whole tenour of the New Testament, in which Christ every where is styled the Prince of peace, and his Gospel represented as introductive of peace and good-will towards men?

The usual solution of this difficulty is this; That such it was intended to be by its benevolent author, but that it was so far perverted by the wickedness of man, that the effects of it proved to be the very reverse of its original design, and it became productive of all the evils which it was intended to prevent.—But this, I think, is by no means satisfactory; because I cannot be persuaded that the wise and beneficent intentions of Providence can ever be defeated by

the folly and wickedness of man; their effects, indeed, may sometimes be delayed by events, which to us may seem adverse, but which, in fact, are necessary to their final completion; and this, in the present instance, I take to be the case. The great end of Christ's coming was to send peace and goodwill amongst men; and this it has undoubtedly effected to a certain degree: his mild and pacific religion has much abated their native ferocity, cruelty, and depravity, and is making a daily progress in this salutary work; but he found it necessary to send with it a sword, to lop off some part of that enormous wickedness, which, at its first appearance, had overspread the world, and to make men by their sufferings capable of its reception; as some inveterate diseases will admit of no remedy without a severe and painful amputation.

This prophecy of Christ, therefore, is not in the least contradictory to his own declarations, or the sense of the scriptures, because they relate to different objects; the first fore-

tells the many miseries which he foresaw men would bring upon themselves, by the abuse and perversion of the religion which he taught them; the latter informs us of the pacific spirit and benevolent design of that religion, and the salutary effects which it must ultimately produce on the morals and happiness of mankind.

M A T T.

M A T T. X. 41.

Ὁ δεχόμενος προφητην εἰς ὄνομα προφητῆ μισ-
θὸν προφητῆ ληψέται.

*He that receiveth a prophet, in the name of a
prophet, shall receive a prophet's reward.*

BY “a prophet” is here to be understood, a holy, religious, and good man; and the meaning of the whole sentence is this:—“He “that receiveth a prophet,” that is, he that entertains, assists, and patronises a religious and good man; “in the name of a prophet,” that is, because he is, and has the name and character of a religious and good man; “shall “receive a prophet’s reward;” that is, is entitled to, and shall receive as great a reward as the religious and good man himself. That he should receive an equal reward is perfectly agreeable to divine justice, because, entertaining and patronising a pious and virtuous man, from the sole consideration of his merit, demonstrates a heart as much de-

voted to piety and virtue as any action which the worthy object of his favour can possibly perform.

If this is true, the converse must be true likewise; that is, that he that entertains, protects, and patronises an impious, a profligate man, for the sake of his vices, is as criminal, and shall receive as severe a punishment, as the most abandoned of his favorites: and this with equal justice, because the approbation of wickedness in others, having no temptation for an excuse, is more atrocious, and demonstrates a more depraved disposition, than even the practice of it. The seduction of pleasure, the lure of interest, or the violence of our passions, may be some, though a poor apology, for the commission of crimes; but to sit coolly by and view with pleasure the iniquities and profligacy of others, and to encourage them by our favour, approbation, and rewards, indicates a disposition more compleatly depraved than the commission of them: but, depraved as it is, we see instances of it every day;

day ; we see the most impious and profane, the most corrupt and dissolute, sometimes the idols of the vulgar, and more frequently the idols of the great ; we see them, without any introduction or recommendation, except their vices, entertained, carested, and patronised by the rich and powerful, who look with envy and admiration on a degree of profligacy in them, which they themselves are unable to arrive at.

M A T T. XI. 25.

Ἐν ἐκείνῳ τῷ καιρῷ ἀποκριθεὶς ὁ Ἰησοῦς, εἶπεν·
 Ἐξομολογῆμαι σοι πατερ, κυριε τε ἑρᾶνε καὶ
 τῆς γῆς, ὅτι ἀπεκρύψας ταῦτα ἀπὸ σοφῶν καὶ
 συνετῶν, καὶ ἀπεκαλύψας αὐτὰ νηπιῖσι.

*Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O
 Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because
 thou hast hid these things from the wise and
 prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.*

IT seems not a little extraordinary, that
 Jesus should, in this solemn manner, re-
 turn thanks to his heavenly Father, for hav-
 ing hid from the wise and prudent the mys-
 teries of that gospel, which he himself came
 into the world to promulgate, on the know-
 ledge of which the salvation of mankind de-
 pended; but this may be very well ac-
 counted for by a proper explanation of these
 words.

By the "wise," I apprehend, are to be here
 understood, those self-sufficient reasoners
 who

who will believe no divine revelation which does not exactly tally with their own imperfect ideas of truth, nor obey any precepts which are not conformable to their notions of justice and the fitness of things. By the "prudent," are meant those, who pay little attention to any religion, but are perpetually employed in worldly occupations, and the pursuits of interest and ambition. Jesus, having experienced the obstinacy and perverseness, with which persons under both these descriptions rejected the revelation which he offered them, and at the same time the readiness with which it was thankfully received by the meek, the humble, the teachable, and the innocent, returns thanks to his heavenly Father, (that is, in the form of an address, adores and admires the wisdom and justice of God), for having so contrived the nature of the Gospel, that it was less acceptable, and less intelligible to those who, from their evil dispositions, deserved not to partake of the benefits which it confers, than to those who are more worthy to receive

receive them : and this seems to be nothing more than what we all do, or ought to do, which is, to thank, admire, and adore our gracious Creator, for having so constituted the essence of all human vices and virtues, that each are naturally productive of their own punishments and rewards.

MATT. XVI. 18.

Και ἐπὶ ταύτῃ τῇ πέτρᾳ οἰκοδομήσω μὲς τὴν
ἐκκλησίαν.

Upon this rock will I build my church.

FROM this declaration of Christ it plainly appears, that he intended to be the founder of a church, that is, a society of persons believing his divine mission, and openly professing the religion which he came to publish to mankind; which society should be vested with the powers and privileges of a corporate body, and exercise them under his protection to the end of the world; but we do not find that, by any precepts delivered during his life, or any instructions left behind him at his death, he ever communicated to his disciples any plan of the formation of this church, or any rules for the government of it when formed. The reason of which I take to be this:—He knew the administration of this government must fall into
the

the hands of men, be blended with their worldly interests, and in consequence be soon corrupted and abused, and therefore unworthy of divine authority ; and that, if he appointed any particular form, or specific regulations for the management of it, he must have given some degree of sanction to those future corruptions and abuses. He knew, likewise, that it was unnecessary ; because a community, once established, must naturally produce rule and subordination, that is, a government, because it cannot subsist without one. He instituted a church, because, without some institution of that kind, his religion must quickly have been banished from the world, and known nowhere but in the closets of a few speculative philosophers, and therefore had little influence on the general conduct of mankind ; but he chose rather to trust the form and regulations of it to the nature of man, and the nature of government, than to any positive command. He did not ordain that when his religion should have spread over every
quarter

quarter of the globe, this church should become equally extensive, and be governed by one supreme head, his successor and representative. He did not command, that in every respective country this church should be placed under the dominion of bishops or presbyters, of councils, convocations, or synods. He has prescribed no forms of worship, except one short prayer; no particular habits for the ministers who officiate; no places set apart for the performance of religious duties, or decorations for those places to excite reverence and devotion in the performers. All these he has left to the decision of future ages, to be ordered by different communities, in different countries, in a manner that shall best suit the tempers of the people, the genius of their government, and the opinions of the times; provided nothing is introduced inconsistent with the purity of his original institution. From hence evidently appears the ignorance and absurdity of those who reject all ecclesiastical authority as human impositions, and deny the
 very

very existence of any Christian church, in contradiction to the express declarations of its founder ; and not less of those who refuse compliance with any national religious establishment, because they cannot find the form and ceremonies of it exactly delineated and prescribed in any part of the New Testament.

Christ has instituted ecclesiastical, in the same manner that God has civil government, that is, by making it necessary, without directing the mode of its administration; because, though the thing itself is necessary, the mode is not so.

MATT. XIX. 4, 5.

Ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς, εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· Ὅτι ἀνεγνώσε, ὅτι ὁ ποιήσας ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ ἐποίησεν αὐτοὺς ;

Καὶ εἶπεν· Ἐνεκὲν τούτου καὶ ἀλειψέει ἄνθρωπος τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὴν μητέρα, καὶ προσκολληθήσεται τῇ γυναίκῃ αὐτῆς, καὶ ἔσονται οἱ δύο εἰς σὰρκα μιαν.

And he answered and said, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning, made them male and female ;

And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife : and they twain shall be one flesh ?

SHOULD there be any controversy concerning the lawfulness of polygamy under the Christian dispensation, this declaration of its author is surely sufficiently decisive in the negative ; because, if a man and a woman, by marriage, become one flesh, it seems impossible that a greater number
than

than two should be incorporated by that union ; and, if a man is commanded to leave his father and mother, and cleave to one wife, he is surely not at liberty to cleave to another.

The question here put to Jesus was not, indeed, concerning polygamy, but divorce ; but his answer comprehended them both, and declares, by the clearest implication, that the first ought not to be permitted, and, in express words, that the last is absolutely unlawful in all cases, except in that of adultery.

The advocates for polygamy alledge, That the practice of it is recorded as far back as history carries us, to the earliest ages of the world ; that it was allowed during the whole period of the Jewish theocracy, and continued by that people till the coming of Christ, and then not prohibited by any positive command ; and that, therefore, though from a change of circumstances in the present times it may not be expedient, it cannot certainly be unlawful.—This argument has
surely

surely much weight ; but in answer it may be said, That, although we do not find it anywhere in the New Testament absolutely forbid, it is, in this and several other places, highly disapproved of by the clearest implications ; and indeed it is by no means credible, that a custom so licentious, so injurious to one, and so destructive to the domestic happiness of both sexes ; a custom, even at that time, rejected by almost all the Gentile nations ; should be adopted or permitted under the purity of the Christian institution.

The true state of the case I take to be this :—Multitudes of the Jews, unable to resist the preaching of Christ, and the evidence of his divine mission enforced by so many miracles, every day became converts to his religion ; but, being extremely fond of the ceremonies and customs of their own, could not suddenly be prevailed on to relinquish them. Of none were they more tenacious than of this of polygamy, in which they and their forefathers had been indulged for so

than two should be incorporated by that union ; and, if a man is commanded to leave his father and mother, and cleave to one wife, he is surely not at liberty to cleave to another.

The question here put to Jesus was not, indeed, concerning polygamy, but divorce ; but his answer comprehended them both, and declares, by the clearest implication, that the first ought not to be permitted, and, in express words, that the last is absolutely unlawful in all cases, except in that of adultery.

The advocates for polygamy alledge, That the practice of it is recorded as far back as history carries us, to the earliest ages of the world ; that it was allowed during the whole period of the Jewish theocracy, and continued by that people till the coming of Christ, and then not prohibited by any positive command ; and that, therefore, though from a change of circumstances in the present times it may not be expedient, it cannot certainly be unlawful.—This argument has
surely

fully much weight ; but in answer it may be said, That, although we do not find it anywhere in the New Testament absolutely forbid, it is, in this and several other places, highly disapproved of by the clearest implications ; and indeed it is by no means credible, that a custom so licentious, so injurious to one, and so destructive to the domestic happiness of both sexes ; a custom, even at that time, rejected by almost all the Gentile nations ; should be adopted or permitted under the purity of the Christian institution.

The true state of the case I take to be this :—Multitudes of the Jews, unable to resist the preaching of Christ, and the evidence of his divine mission enforced by so many miracles, every day became converts to his religion ; but, being extremely fond of the ceremonies and customs of their own, could not suddenly be prevailed on to relinquish them. Of none were they more tenacious than of this of polygamy, in which they and their forefathers had been indulged for so

many centuries, and which had been authorised by the example of characters, to whom they looked up with the most profound veneration ; and therefore many of them, after their conversion, continued in the practice of it.

That they did so, seems to be confirmed by what St. Paul writes to Titus, that “ a bishop must be blameless, the husband of one wife ;” that is, that although polygamy might be overlooked in some of the Jewish converts, who could not be prevailed on to accept Christianity on any other terms, it could not be suffered in any one who undertook so important and so sacred an office as that of a bishop ; whose life ought to be exemplary, and his conduct free even from the imputation of all blame.—From hence it appears evident, that polygamy was always considered, by Christ and his Apostles, as incompatible with the religion which they taught ; and that, although it might be tolerated in some of the Jewish proselytes, who had immemorial custom to plead in its behalf,

half, yet, even in them, it was looked upon as extremely blameable, and was never claimed by or permitted to any of the Gentiles who were converted.

MATT. XX. 15, 16.

Ἡ ἔκ ἐξέσι μοι ποιησαι ὁ θελω ἐν τοις ἐμοις;
ἢ ὁ ὀφθαλμος σε πονηρος ἐστιν, ὅτι ἐγὼ ἀγαθος
εἰμι;

Οὕτως ἐσονται οἱ ἐσχατοί, πρῶτοι, καὶ οἱ
πρῶτοι, ἐσχατοί.

*Is it not lawful for me to do what I will
with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I
am good?*

So the last shall be first, and the first last.

IN order to understand this parable of the
householder, who paid his labourers not
in proportion to the time in which they
worked, or the work which they had per-
formed, but according to his own pleasure;
it is necessary to remember to whom, and on
what occasion it was spoken. Jesus had just
before declared, that when he should sit on
his throne of glory, his twelve Apostles
should sit on twelve thrones, judging the
twelve

twelve tribes of Israel. Many of his auditors, who had but lately seen these men employed in the lowest occupations, and by no means eminent for their virtues or abilities, thought this a very partial declaration, and this promised exaltation far superior to their merits. To these this parable was particularly addressed; intended to teach them, that all power, glory, and happiness, are the sole property of God, and that he alone has a right to dispose of them according to his pleasure; that all which we enjoy is a free gift from his benevolence, and not a compensation for our merits; that our merits, if we have any, are derived from him; that even these merits proceed from his grace, and the rewards of them from his bounty; that we ought to be thankful for the benefits we receive from his favor, and have no pretence to complain of his partiality, if we see greater conferred on those who may appear to us to deserve them less; that we are bad judges of the merits of others, and worse of our own, and that therefore, in a

future life, many who are now last in our estimation, will be first in happiness and glory; and many whom we now admire for their virtues, and imagine will be first in that state, will be the last, that is, least meritorious in the sight of their just and all-discerning judge. From whence we may learn, that it is the highest presumption in us to circumscribe the right of our Creator, in the distribution of his favours, by our imperfect notion of fitness and equity, to set bounds to the operations of any one of his attributes by confronting it with another, to limit his power by the effects of his mercy, or the effects of his mercy by those of his justice. His attributes are all above our comprehension, and therefore we ought only to adore them in silence, and submit to his decision with gratitude and resignation.

M A T T.

M A T T. XXII. 21.

ΤΟΤΕ ΛΕΓΕΙ ΑΥΤΟΙΣ· Ἀποδοτε ἐν τα Καί-
σαρ^ῶ, Καίσαρι· καὶ τὰ τε Θεῷ, τῷ Θεῷ.

*Then said he unto them, Render unto Cæsar
the things which are Cæsar's; and unto God,
the things which are God's.*

IN order to ensnare Jesus into offending
either their own nation, or the Roman
government, under which they were then
subjected, the Jews said unto him, “ Tell
“ us, therefore, what thinkest thou, Is it law-
“ ful to give tribute unto Cæsar, or not ?”
A question the most insidious, and most dan-
gerous to decide on, that art or malice could
have contrived ; because, in the decision of
it, the most important political rights were
to be determined : Whether they, being a
people chosen by God, could lawfully sub-
mit to the government of any but God ; or
some one of their own nation, deputed by his

M 4 immediate

immediate direction?—Whether conquest, which is but unjust, though successful violence, can give a just right to govern?—Whether one nation can have a right to rule over, and consequently to impose tribute on another?—And, Whether any sovereign can lawfully compel subjects to pay taxes, without their own consent? If Christ had thought it ever proper for him to give directions on political topics, he certainly would not have neglected this opportunity; but he now, and at all times, industriously avoided it, and said, “Shew me the tribute money:” then replies to their question, by asking them another, “Whose is this image and superscription?” They answered, “Cæsar’s.” Then said he unto them, “Render, therefore, unto Cæsar, the things which are Cæsar’s; and unto God, the things which are God’s.”

Many opinions, by the ingenuity of commentators, have been extracted from these few words of Christ. Some have thought, that, by them, he intended to explode that
 favorite

favorite notion, that they could not be lawfully governed by any except God. Some have asserted, that, by here acknowledging the title of Cæsar, he had established the right of all conquerors to rule over the people whom they had subdued. Others would persuade us, that, by the things which are Cæsar's, are to be understood, taxes imposed by the state; and, by the things which are God's, the revenues of the church: and it is surprising, that no courtly divine has undertaken to prove, from this short decision, that every sovereign has a right to seize on all the money which bears his image and superscription. But certainly none of these fanciful conjectures have any foundation in these words of Christ; which are no more than an evasive answer to an insidious question, and a declaration of what he takes every opportunity of declaring, That he did not come to decide political controversies, to settle the rights of conquerors and the conquered, or of sovereigns and subjects; and that the only instructions which
 he

he could give on that head were, to pay quietly tribute and submission to whatever government they lived under, without unnecessary inquiries into the lawfulness of their claims ; but to inquire diligently after the will of God, and pay the strictest obedience to it on every occasion.

M A T T. XXVI. 39.

Και προελθὼν μικρὸν, ἔπεσεν ἐπὶ προσωποῦ
αὐτοῦ, προσευχομένῳ, καὶ λέγων, Πατερ μου, εἰ
δυνατὸν ἐστὶ, παρελθετω ἀπ' ἐμοῦ τὸ ποτήριον
τῆτο.

*And he went a little farther, and fell on his
face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be
possible, let this cup pass from me.*

THE hypothetical words, inserted in
this fervent address of Christ to his
heavenly Father, seem to establish the truth
of two important propositions: First, That
there may be, and actually are, evils inherent
in the nature of things, which even Omnipotence
cannot prevent; and, that we have reason to
conclude, that all which we suffer in this
life, except such as we bring upon ourselves
by our misconduct or mutual injuries, are of
this kind; that is, such as cannot be prevented
without the admission of greater evils, or the
loss of good more than equivalent;

valent ; because we cannot suppose that a Creator of infinite power and goodness, would admit any others into any part of his works.

The second proposition is, That the sufferings and death of Christ are likewise of this kind, absolutely necessary as an atonement for the sins of mankind, and therefore unpreventable by any power, without defeating the great design of the benevolent but dreadful task which he had undertaken. As such they are represented, by himself and his Apostles, throughout every part of the New Testament ; not as contingencies, like those of other martyrs in the cause of religion, but as an essential part of the original plan of his mission. From whence this necessity arises, we have not faculties to conceive : but it must be certainly from some connections between suffering and sin, that is, between natural and moral evil, totally beyond the reach of our comprehensions.

Christ, under the most terrible apprehensions

hensions of his approaching execution, fell on his face, and prayed, saying, “ O my “ Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass “ from me ;” that is, if it be possible to procure the redemption of mankind without this sacrifice : but it was not possible, and therefore he voluntarily submitted to drink it, as the only means to accomplish that benevolent end ; and, in proof of it, says, “ No “ man taketh my life from me, but I lay “ it down of myself*.” No doubt of its possibility could arise from any other cause, for surely it was not only possible, but very easy, for the power of God to have delivered him out of the hands of man. He might have changed the hearts of his enemies : he might have defeated their malice, by placing him in a situation beyond their reach, or by sending twelve legions of angels to his assistance : “ But how then shall “ the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must “ be † ?” that is, How then shall the prophe-

* John x. 18.

† Matt. xxvi. 53.

cies and promises be fulfilled, which assure us, that this important purpose can be effected by no other means, nor satisfaction made for the sins of the world on any other terms ?

MARK

MARK II. 27.

Και ἔλεfen αὐτοῖς· Το σαββατον δια τον αν-
θρωπον ἐγενετο, ἔχ ὁ ἄνθρωπος δια το σαβ-
βατον.

*And he said unto them, The sabbath was
made for man, and not man for the sabbath.*

THIS was the reply which Christ made to the Pharisees, who had frequently reprov'd him for healing the sick on the sabbath-day ; and, in the present instance, for suffering his disciples to pluck a few ears of corn as they walked through the fields on that day ; by which we are to understand, that his opinion on this subject was, that the keeping holy the sabbath-day was a wise and excellent institution, admirably contriv'd for the benefit of mankind, but not of such indispensable importance, that we should think it is the chief duty of our lives, or that we were placed in this world on purpose to perform it.

The Pharisees were a sect of the Jews, noted for their spiritual pride and hypocrisy, who pretended to extraordinary sanctity, by a strict and superstitious observance of every ceremony appointed by the Mosaic law, particularly that of keeping holy the sabbath, with a rigour beyond what the good of society would admit, or the institution itself required ; and it is not a little remarkable, that the sectaries of all times have followed their example in this instance ; they have all thought, or pretended to think, that a rigorous observance of this day is the first of all Christian duties, and the neglect of it the most enormous of all crimes ; whereas, properly speaking, it is no Christian duty at all, in any other sense, than that it is the duty of every Christian to comply with every institution, from whatsoever source it may be derived, which tends to promote religion and virtue amongst mankind.

The keeping holy the sabbath-day was originally enjoined, by a positive commandment, to the Jews in the Mosaic law ; and,

as

as such, was observed by Christ and his Apostles, as was every other part of that law, and was afterwards retained by the Christians of all succeeding ages, for its peculiar excellence and utility, when all the rest were laid aside. But I do not recollect that it is any where enjoined by Christ or his Apostles, or even mentioned in the New Testament, except in this and some other places in which he reproves the Pharisees for their hypocritical and superstitious observance of it, by converting a day that was intended to be set apart for rest, joy, and thanksgiving, into a season of mortification and self-denial of all comforts and conveniences of life.

But this lessens not the force of our obligation to keep this day in a proper manner; that is, to abstain from labour and all worldly cares and occupations, and to employ it in acts of devotion, charity, and hospitality; for which we have the example of Christ and his Apostles, and of every Christian church from their times to the present

day. The excellence, likewise, of the institution itself cannot fail to recommend it; for, certainly, there never was any other so well calculated to promote the interests of piety and virtue, to call off the worldly-minded from the perpetual toils of ambition and avarice, and to give leisure to those who are better disposed, to improve and cultivate those better dispositions; to afford relief to the poor from incessant labour, and to the rich from continual dissipation, and to produce some sense of religion in the vulgar, and some appearance of it in the great.

MARK VIII. 38.

Ὅς γὰρ ἂν ἐπαισχυθῇ με καὶ τοὺς ἔμμες λογὸς ἐν τῇ γενεᾷ ταυτῇ τῇ μοιχαλιδὶ καὶ ἁμαρτωλῷ, καὶ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐπαισχυθησέσθαι αὐτὸν ὅταν ἔλθῃ ἐν τῇ δόξῃ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ, μετὰ τῶν ἀγγέλων τῶν ἁγίων.

Whosoever, therefore, shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father.

MANY and severe are the threats which we find denounced by Christ against hypocrites; that is, against those who pretended an extraordinary sanctity in their manners and conversation, without having any true sense of religion or morality in their hearts. The words before us are a threat, likewise, against hypocrites, but hypocrites of a very different sort; those who pretend to be more profligate than they really are,

and therefore may properly be called hypocrites in wickedness. These are much more numerous in the present times, and perhaps more mischievous than the former ; as those do honour to religion and virtue by their pretences to them, these affront them by an open disavowal. Those make others better than themselves, and these worse, by their example. We meet with this ridiculous and criminal kind of hypocrisy every day ; we see men affecting to be guilty of vices for which they have no relish, of profligacy for which they have not constitutions, and of crimes which they have not courage to perform. They lay claim to the honour of cheating, at the time they are cheated, and endeavour to pass for knaves, when, in fact, they are but fools. These are the offenders of whom Christ will be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father ; which will be a dreadful but just punishment, and a proper retaliation of that foolish and impious modesty, which induced them to be ashamed of him and his word, in complaisance

fance to a sinful and adulterous generation ;
and to be less afraid of incurring the dis-
pleasure of the best of all Beings, than the
profane ridicule of the worst of men.

MARK XVI. 15, 16.

Και εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· Πορευθέντες εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἅπαντα, κηρύξατε τὸ εὐαγγέλιον πάσῃ τῇ κτίσει.

Ὁ πιστεύσας καὶ βαπτισθεὶς σωθήσεται· ὁ δὲ ἀπισήσας, κατακριθήσεται.

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

He that believeth, and is baptised, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned.

THIS is the commission, together with the promises and threats annexed to it, which Christ gave to his Apostles when he sent them forth to preach the gospel to every part of the world: in which these three important questions offer themselves to our serious consideration; What is meant by believing? What is meant by being saved? and, What by being damned?—Believing cannot here be understood to signify the giving

ing assent to the tradition of one church, or to the creeds and articles of another, or even to the historical facts recorded in the New Testament; because, at the time when this commission was delivered, no church existed, no creeds or articles were formed, nor was the New Testament written. Believing, in the language of that book, is for the most part used as a term synonymous to that of becoming a Christian. Thus it is related of the nobleman, whose son Jesus had cured, "Himself believed, and his whole house*;" and thus it is said, that "many of the Jews, "which had seen the things which Jesus did, "believed on him†;" that is, were converted to the religion which he taught, and became Christians; for which purpose nothing more was then required, than to acknowledge that Jesus was the Son of God (that is, the Messiah expected by the Jews and foretold by the prophets), and to receive baptism as an external and visible sign of their initiation

* John iv. 53.

† John xi. 45.

into this holy fraternity, which was immediately administered to them on their assenting to this single proposition, as we find it was by Philip to the eunuch, without asking any further questions.

In the next place, What is meant by being saved? In order to understand this expression, it is necessary to recollect that, throughout the New Testament, we are everywhere informed, that mankind, in the present life, are in a state of guilt and depravity, under sentence of condemnation, and incapable of admission into the kingdom of Heaven; that, in order to redeem them from this unhappy situation, Christ came into the world, and offered them a religion which was effectual for that purpose; and that, whoever shall believe on him (that is, acknowledge his divine authority, accept the religion which he taught, and testify this acceptance by baptism) shall by this, and the atonement made for sin by his sufferings and death, be saved (that is, absolved from their guilt, excused from that sentence, freed from that

that

that incapacity, and placed in a state, which, although it may be forfeited by their future misbehaviour, is, in the language of scripture, called salvation). This I take to be the true meaning of being saved; which, without some retrospect, can have no meaning at all.

By being damned, is not here to be understood, being consigned to a state of everlasting punishment, according to the vulgar acceptation of that phrase in our translation, in which sense, I believe, it is nowhere used by the writers of the New Testament—the original word is κατακριθῆσεται, *condemnat*^{ur}, which signifies simply, *will be condemned, or found guilty*, without referring to any punishment whatever. In the present instance, it means nothing more than the reverse of being saved. “He that believeth will be saved, but he that believeth not cannot be saved;” that is, Whoever refuses this gracious offer can receive no benefit from it, but must remain in the same state of guilt, condemnation, and exclusion from
the

the kingdom of Heaven, as if no such offer had been made ; not as a punishment, but as a necessary consequence of his unbelief. This is not a threat, but a declaration ; in which there is no more injustice or severity, than in that of a physician, who, having prescribed a specific medicine to a patient labouring under an inveterate disease, assures him, that if he takes it, he will certainly recover ; but if he will not, he will as certainly die.—This fair interpretation of this passage I think a full vindication of the justice and goodness of God, from the blasphemous imputations sometimes thrown on the divine conduct, in condemning his creatures to eternal misery, merely for not assenting to propositions which many cannot believe, and more cannot understand ; for which there is not the least foundation in the words before us.

LUKE XI. 8.

Λεγω ὑμῖν, εἰ καὶ ἔδωσει αὐτῷ ἄνασας, διὰ
το εἶναι αὐτῷ φίλον, διὰ γε τὴν ἀναιδείαν αὐτῷ
ἐγερθεὶς δώσει αὐτῷ ὅσων χρῆζει.

*I say unto you, Though he will not rise and
give him because he is his friend; yet, because
of his importunity, he will rise and give him as
many as he needeth.*

THIS parable, and also another of the
importunate widow, in the second chap-
ter, seems to represent the Deity as teased
into compliance, and granting requests, not
from the reasonableness of the petition, or
the merits of the petitioners, but merely
to put an end to their troublesome im-
portunities. This in man would cer-
tainly be a weakness, but in the Supreme
Judge and disposer of all things is an abso-
lute impossibility; and therefore cannot be
the intention of this parable. But, in order
to understand the sense of this, and many
other passages in both the Old and New
Testament,

Testament, we should remember, that, although these, as well as other writings of remoter ages, abound in more sublime ideas, and more beautiful figures, than the compositions of later ages; yet we must not expect to find in them the same correctness and precision. In their similes, provided there were some resemblance in their principal features, little regard was paid to their disagreement in all the rest. Thus the psalmist compares the unity of brethren to the precious ointment on the head of Aaron, which ran down to his beard, and even to the skirts of his cloathing; between which there is not the least similitude, except that they were both precious and pleasant things. In their parables and fables, provided the great outlines corresponded with the moral which they designed to inculcate, they attended not to the collateral circumstances which were introduced into the story; and therefore we ought never to draw any conclusions from them. Thus, in the parable of the marriage of the king's son, the king,

king, observing that one of the guests had not on a wedding garment, commanded him to be bound hand and foot, and cast into outer darkness; by which we are taught, that whosoever comes to Christ, that is, pretends to be a Christian, without the proper cloathing of righteousness and faith, will incur his displeasure, and be severely punished. But we must not compare the just dispensations of Providence, with the unjust sentence of the king, who punished a man for not having on a wedding garment, who had been but just before picked up in the highway, and could not have been expected to have been properly dressed for such an entertainment.

In like manner, in this parable, the sole intention is to inculcate the duty of fervent and importunate prayer, together with the deserved success which attends it. This is very well illustrated by the persevering importunity of the petitioner, and the compleat though late compliance of his friend. The motive which at last induced him to
comply,

comply, after so long and obstinate a refusal, is a collateral circumstance, which makes no part of the parable. The parable applies only to the fact, not to the motive which produced it ; and therefore that is not to be attended to.

LUKE XI. 24, 25, 26.

Ὅταν το ἀκαθαρτον πνευμα ἐξέλθῃ ἀπο τῆ ἀνθρώπου, διερχέται δι' ἀνυδρων τοπων ζητῶν ἀναπαυσιν· καὶ μὴ εὑρίσκον, λέγει· Ὑποσρεψω εἰς τον οἶκον μου, ὅθεν ἐξήλθον.

Καὶ ἔλθον εὑρίσκει σεσαρωμενον καὶ κεκοσμημενον.

Τότε πορεύεται καὶ παραλαμβάνει ἑπτὰ ἕτερα πνευμάτια πονηροτερα ἑαυτῆ, καὶ εἰσελθοντα κατοικεῖ ἐκεῖ· καὶ γινέται τα ἑσχατὰ τῆ ἀνθρώπου ἐκείνῃ χειρονα των πρώτων.

When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest : and finding none, he saith, I will return to my house whence I came out.

And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished.

Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there : and the last state of that man is worse than the first.

I KNOW of no passage throughout the New Testament so obscure as this, nor

one which the commentators have been so little able to explain :—for which end, it is in the first place necessary to observe, that, in the times in which the gospels were written, an opinion was universally adopted, both by Jews and Gentiles, that madness, idiotism, many of the diseases, and much of the wickedness of mankind, were occasioned by evil spirits, who got possession of their minds and bodies ; and that these spirits, when cast out by some superior power, wandered about in solitary and uninhabited deserts, restless and miserable, until they were able to return to their old, or to occupy some new habitation.

This passage is plainly founded on this idea, and on this supposition will be found not altogether unintelligible ; but may be fairly explained in the following manner :—
 “ When the unclean spirit goeth out of a man, he, the spirit, walketh in dry places, (that is, wandereth about in dry and sandy deserts) seeking rest ; and finding none, he saith to himself, I will return to my house whence I came out (that is, to the possession

possession of the same person from whom I have been expelled) and when he cometh there, if he findeth it swept and garnished, (that is, prepared and made ready for his reception by the person's relapse into his former state of depravity) then taketh he to him seven spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there (that is, they enter and fix their habitation there, and cannot again be cast out); so the last state of that man is worse than the first."—The meaning of all which, divested of metaphor and reduced to common language, I take to be this :—When any one, who has, by the power of reason and religion, expelled from his heart impious and malevolent dispositions, infused into it by the operations of evil spirits, shall suffer himself again to fall under their dominion, they will return with sevenfold strength, and the man will be many degrees more wicked than he was before.

That evil spirits did, in those ages, take possession of the minds and bodies of human

VOL. IV.

O

beings,

beings, we cannot doubt, if we give any credit to history, sacred or profane; and, although the sagacity of the present more enlightened times hath exploded this opinion with contempt and ridicule, yet we see daily instances, which must induce us to believe, that their power is not even now totally at an end. We see some labouring under diseases which the most skilful physicians are unable to account for or to cure; others perpetrating the most horrid crimes without provocation, temptation, or advantage: we see the hand of the suicide plunging the dagger into his own breast, in contradiction to his reason, his principles, and his corporeal feelings: And must we not conclude, that all these unaccountable actions proceed from the directions of some external powers, which the actors are unable to resist? In madness we plainly perceive two distinct wills operating at the same time, one of which compels a man to commit the most outrageous acts, which the other disapproves, but cannot controul; nay, sometimes

sometimes foresees, for a considerable time, that he shall be so compelled, but is unable to prevent it.

I cannot conclude this observation, without adding another, on the next succeeding verse, in which we are informed, that, “as he spake these things, a certain woman of the company lift up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked.” She had listened to his excellent and intelligible discourse for some time, which she perfectly understood; but when he spake these things, which were above her comprehension, she could no longer forbear lifting up her voice and uttering this pathetic exclamation, to express her applause and admiration. This is a picture so exactly copied from nature and experience, that we can have no doubt of its truth; and is here only mentioned as a mark of the fidelity with which the most minute incidents are recorded by the Evangelical historians.

LUKE XIV. 10.

Ἀλλ' ὅταν κληθῇς, πορευθεὶς ἀναπεσον εἰς τὸν
ἐσχαλὸν τοπον.

*But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in
the lowest room.*

CHRISTIANITY is the best-bred religion in the world, although the manners of some of its most rigid professors seem to contradict this assertion. There is not a single quality required in the composition of a true Christian, which is not equally requisite in the character of a well-bred man ; nor a single deviation from politeness, which does not, under the Christian law, become a crime, because it tends to defeat the two great objects of that holy institution, which are to promote peace and goodwill on earth, and to qualify us for the kingdom of heaven.

Many were the lessons by which Christ endeavoured to infuse this amiable virtue
into

into the minds of his disciples ; in the command before us he forbids every insolent attempt to precedence, as equally adverse to Christianity as to good manners, as it denotes a proud heart and high spirit, inconsistent with the humble precepts of that religion. He says, " Whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain," that is, In the intercourses of social life, be ready to comply with every innocent proposal, and in every office of civility perform twice as much, as is either required or expected. This, therefore, is Christianity, as well as politeness.—Again, he says, " Whosoever shall be angry with his brother, without a cause," (that is, shall enter into violent, angry, and peevish disputes about nothing) " shall be in danger of the judgment [or displeasure of God]; but whosoever shall say to his brother, Thou fool ! shall be in danger of hell-fire ;" that is, Who shall make use of such opprobrious and affronting expressions as may provoke retaliation and resentment, which may end in violence and

bloodshed, is answerable for the consequences, and therefore shall be in danger of the severest punishment.—Thus we see, that every virtue enjoined by Christianity as a duty, is recommended by politeness as an accomplishment. Gentleness, humility, deference, affability, and a readiness to assist and serve on all occasions, are as necessary in the composition of a true Christian as in that of a well-bred man; passion, moroseness, peevishness, and supercilious self-sufficiency, are equally repugnant to the characters of both:—who differ in this only, that the true Christian really is what the well-bred man but pretends to be, and would be still better bred if he was.

LUKE XV. 7.

Λεγω ὑμῖν, ὅτι ἔτω χαρὰ ἔσαι ἐν τῷ
 ἔρῳ ἐπὶ ἐνὶ ἁμαρτωλῷ μελαινοῦντι, ἢ ἐπὶ ἐν-
 νενηκονῳαεννεα δικαίοις, οἵτινες ἔχρειαν ἔχουσιν
 μελαινοῦντας.

*I say unto you, That joy shall be in heaven
 over one sinner that repenteth, more than over
 ninety and nine just persons who need no re-
 pentance.*

SOME modern enthusiasts entertain such
 favourable ideas of repentance. as to
 place it higher, in the catalogue of Christian
 virtues, than even perfect innocence itself.
 They seem to think, that a man must be a
 sinner before he can be a saint; and that, if
 his repentance be sincere, his merits will rise
 in proportion to his past offences. Nay,
 some have gone so far as to recommend
 wickedness as preparatory to repentance,
 and therefore necessary to insure our sal-
 vation. False and impious as these princi-

ples are, they may, perhaps, like most errors, have some foundation in truth misunderstood; for we certainly see in this, and many other parts of the New Testament, an extraordinary degree of merit imputed, and an extraordinary degree of favour shewn, to earnest and sincere repentance; although repentance, however sincere and successful, can do no more than place the sinner in the same state as if he had never offended. How then comes it to pass, that we find here a more joyful reception into heaven bestowed upon the sinner who hath repented, than upon ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance? This seems to be a dispensation not easily reconcileable with the wisdom and justice of God; and therefore I do not apprehend that, by these words, any preference is given to sinners who repent, above the righteous who need no repentance, because, in such a state of perfection no human being ever existed; and therefore the competition can only lie between those who have committed great crimes,
of

of which they are truly sensible, and have sincerely repented, and those who have been daily guilty of many smaller offences, of which they are so little conscious as to think they need no repentance. This is clearly exemplified by the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, who went up to the temple to pray*. The Pharisee, unconscious of his unworthiness, thought he needed no repentance, and therefore only thanked God that he was not as other men; extortioners, unjust, adulterous, or even as this Publican: the Publican, sensible of the many crimes which he had committed, and sincerely sorry for them, stood afar off, and would not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner." "I tell you," says Christ, "this man went down to his house justified rather than the other."

Perhaps, also, there may be something in a sincere repentance for past offences, more acceptable to God, and more congenial to

* Luke xviii. 10.

the true spirit of Christianity, and therefore more productive of joy in heaven, than in any degree of original righteousness of which human nature is capable. The painter and the sculptor shew, that beauty cannot be formed by compasses and a rule; a face in which every feature was faultless would be stiff, formal, and unpleasing; there must be some small deviations from exact symmetry, to enable it to strike the eye and captivate the heart of every beholder. Just so in our morals, was it possible for any one to act at all times, and on all occasions, as he ought, his conduct would form a character rather admirable than amiable, unnatural to man, and unlike that of a Christian, because it would certainly be accompanied with some kind of arrogance, self-sufficiency, and independence, inconsistent with the lowliness, humility, and diffidence, essential to that religion. Christianity does not expect that we should be guilty of no offences, but that we be sorry for them. It does not require perfection, of which we are incapable; but a broken
and

and contrite heart, repentance for sins past, and perpetual endeavours after future amendment, which is in every man's power. This is the sole principle on which this holy institution is founded, and therefore it is not surprising that there should be extraordinary joy in heaven on every instance of the salutary effects of it, in the conversion and salvation of a sinner.

Experience teaches us, that we receive more joy from the unexpected return of any good, than from the uninterrupted possession of it; from regaining a lost treasure, than from its undisturbed enjoyment; or the recovery of a beloved friend from a dangerous disease, than from the knowledge of his continual health. This is both natural and rational, Why then should not the angels in heaven be affected with the same sensations from the same cause?

LUKE

LUKE XVI. 9.

Κἀγὼ ὑμῖν λεγῶ· Ποιησάτε ἑαυτοῖς φίλους
ἐκ τῆ μαμωνᾶ τῆς ἀδικίας, ἵνα ὅταν ἐκλιπῇτε,
δεξώνται ὑμᾶς εἰς τὰς αἰωνίους σκηνάς.

*And I say unto you, Make to yourselves
friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that,
when ye fail, they may receive you into ever-
lasting habitations.*

NO commentator, ancient or modern,
has yet been able to give us a satisfac-
tory explanation of this exhortation, deli-
vered by Christ to a very numerous audi-
ence: the most plausible is this—That by
the mammon of unrighteousness, we are to
understand ill-gotten wealth; and the advice
which Christ here gives to those who have
so acquired it, is to employ it in acts of
charity and beneficence, by which means,
though they fail in other parts of their duty,
they may obtain admission into everlasting
life.—This interpretation might do very well,
if

if the words would bear it ; but it is certainly impossible, by any torture, to extract out of them such a meaning ; and if such a meaning could be allowed, it would not in the least correspond with the preceding parable : in order to understand which, as well as the words before us, it is necessary to recollect, both on what occasion they were spoken, and to whom they were addressed.

We find, in the foregoing chapter, that whilst Jesus was delivering these several parables to a very great multitude, he observed amongst them some Pharisees attending in the crowd ; a set of men who were perpetually employed in external acts of piety and devotion, and as constantly busied in every species of extortion and fraud. To these Pharisees, equally remarkable for their religion and their roguery, this exhortation was with peculiar propriety addressed ; in which, I apprehend, we are to understand, by the mammon of unrighteousness, the kingdom of Satan ; the existence of which was universally believed in those times,

times, and is frequently mentioned or alluded to in the scriptures, and placed in opposition to the kingdom of God. The advice here given to these men is this—not to attempt, at the same time, to serve God and Mammon; but, when they, by their iniquities, have lost all hopes of admission into the kingdom of light, to secure a reception in the kingdom of darkness, and to imitate the example of the unjust steward, in the parable which he had just before delivered to them, who, having abandoned all expectations of future support from his lord, on account of his misbehaviour, and endeavoured to conciliate to himself the goodness of his tenants, that when he was put out of the stewardship, they might receive him into their houses; for which artful precaution his lord commended him, because he had done wisely, but totally rejected him because he had not done honestly.—This, I think, is a just and fair explanation of this abstruse passage; which seems to be rather an ironical reproof of the

Pharisees for their hypocrisy and avarice, than a serious direction for their conduct, and bears some resemblance to what Joshua said to the Israelites; "If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom you will serve*:" so Christ says, If you will not be subjects of the kingdom of God, make yourselves friends in the kingdom of Satan.

* Joshua xxiv. 15.

LUKE XVI. 25.

Εἶπε δὲ Ἀβρααμ· Τεκνον, μνησθηὶ ὅτι ἀπελαβες οὐ τὰ ἀγαθὰ σὺ ἐν τῇ ζωῇ σου, καὶ Λαζαρος ὁμοίως τὰ κακὰ· νυν δὲ ὁδε παρακαλεῖται, σὺ δὲ ὀδυνασαι.

But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things : but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.

ALL the commentators on this parable seem to have mistaken the intention and moral of it ; they have all understood it, as designed only to inform us, that no judgment can be formed of men's condition in a future life, by the appearances in the present, of either their prosperity or distress : that the rich and great will, if criminal, certainly meet with the punishment due to their offences, in another state, which, by the influence of their power, they may have evaded in this ; and the poor and diseased, if virtuous, will there receive

ceive retribution for all the miseries and ill-treatment which they have undeservedly suffered. In order to accommodate the parable to this interpretation, they have constantly painted the character of Dives in the blackest, and that of Lazarus in the brightest colours; for which there is not the least foundation in the parable itself, as there is not one word said of the criminality of the one, or the merits of the other; Abraham, in his answer to the rich man, does not bid him to remember, that he acquired his wealth by fraud or rapine, or that he had expended it in profligacy or oppression; and that, therefore, he ought not to complain of a punishment which he had so justly deserved. He says nothing of the virtues of Lazarus, that he had been pious, sober, honest, and patient; he only answers the complainant in a friendly manner, "Son, remember that thou in thy life-time receivedst good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented:" by which, I apprehend, he means to address

him:—"Son, although thy present situation is very wretched, and that of Lazarus no less happy, thou hast no reason to arraign the partiality of God; but oughtest to remember, that thou, in a former state, enjoyedst all the pleasures of wealth and prosperity, and that then Lazarus suffered all the miseries of poverty and disease, but that now he is comforted, and thou art tormented, in conformity to that impartial and eternal law of Providence, which instituted the perpetual rotation of good and evil."

From this parable we may learn, that the Supreme disposer of all things distributes good and evil amongst his creatures, not only with justice, but with a greater degree of equality than we imagine; and that this he is enabled to perform by having so wonderfully contrived the disposition of things, and the constitution of man, that riches, power, wealth, and prosperity, in this life, actually lead him into many vices, which will incur punishment in another; and sickness, poverty, and distress, are as naturally
productive

productive of many virtues, which will there merit a reward ; by which means happiness and misery are more equally distributed, at the same time that strict justice is done to every individual according to his deserts, and no one can have any cause to complain.

This idea of the rotation of good and evil, of enjoyments and sufferings, is confirmed by the clearest allusions in several parts of the New Testament; for instance, we there read, that “ it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, “ than for a rich man to enter into the “ kingdom of God *;” not because it is criminal to be rich, but because, whilst riches bestow on their possessors many present gratifications, they usually make them proud, insolent, and profligate, which incapacitates them from becoming members of that holy and happy community. Again, it is said, “ Blessed are those that mourn, for they “ shall be comforted †;” not because there is any merit in mourning, but because

* Matt. xix. 24.

† Matt. v. 4.

afflictions naturally tend to make men humble, sober, patient, and virtuous in this life, for which they will deserve and receive a recompence of comfort in another. This wise disposition of Providence, in the general course of things, although it marks his impartiality, is no impediment to his justice, because it lays no one under compulsion, and may be interrupted by the conduct of every individual. The rich are not obliged to be wicked, nor the poor to be virtuous; a rich man may employ his wealth in such a manner in this life, as to acquire happiness by it in another; and a poor man may be so incorrigible as to make himself very miserable in both. All that we are to learn from it is, to take extraordinary care to avoid those crimes to which our situation renders us peculiarly liable.

JOHN

JOHN III. 3.

Ἀπεκριθὴ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ· Ἀμην
ἀμην λέγω σοι, ἐὰν μὴ τις γέννηθῃ ἄνωθεν, ἔ-
δυναται ἰδεῖν τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ Θεοῦ.

*Jesus answered, and said unto him, Verily,
verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born
again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*

THE meaning of which is this:—That mankind are born or come into the world with dispositions so depraved, so prone to anger, malice, revenge, avarice, and ambition, that it is impossible for them ever to enter into the kingdom of Heaven, except they are so totally changed as to become new creatures. No partial alteration will do; it must be an entire change of temper, sentiments, habits, manners, inclinations, and pursuits. All these turbulent and high-spirited passions must be eradicated, and meekness, gentleness, and poorness of spirit, in-

troduced in their room; anger must give place to patience, malice to benevolence, revenge to forgiveness, and all worldly pursuits to a constant habit of piety and devotion. This, in the language of scripture, is properly and emphatically styled being born again; because it is a kind of entrance upon a new life, and a commencement of a state entirely different from the former. The necessity for this change is sufficiently evident, because, if men could be permitted to carry these evil dispositions with them into the kingdom of God, they would not be happy themselves, nor suffer others to be so.

We see that even upon earth, if a wicked, malignant, and turbulent man was confined for life, in a virtuous, peaceable, and pious society, it would be no inconsiderable punishment; and much more severe would it be in heaven, where the contrast is greater and the duration longer. Wickedness and misery are by nature so closely united, that they cannot be separated, and therefore nei-
ther

ther of them can have a place in the kingdom of God. If any one's dispositions are cruel, malignant, envious, turbulent, factious, and ambitious, though, in contradiction to their impulse, he should perform all the duties of piety, benevolence, humility, and submission, he could not become a member of this holy and happy society, because his admission would be rather a punishment than a reward: before he could attain this state of felicity, he must be qualified to enjoy it, and this can only be effected by being born again. How a man is to be born again, Jesus further informs us in the succeeding verse; he there says, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God;" that is, except a man be born again, by embracing the doctrines and obeying the precepts of his religion, for which purpose the external sign of baptism, and the internal assistance of the Holy Spirit, are absolutely necessary. By these, together with sincere repentance and reformation, he

may become a new person, and perfectly qualified to be, and to make others happy in that blessed community; and when qualified, however great may have been his former offences, he will be readily admitted, and there will be joy in heaven at his reception.

JOHN VI. 44.

Οὐδεὶς δύναται ἔλθειν πρὸς με, εἰ μὴ ὁ πατήρ
ὁ πεμψάς με, ἐλκύσῃ αὐτόν.

*No man can come to me, except the Father,
which hath sent me, draw him.*

MOST of our commentators, apprehensive lest the obvious sense of these words would lead them into difficulties concerning the grace of God, and the free-will of man, which they were unable to solve, have endeavoured to explain them away, and substitute other significations, for which there is no authority. The true meaning I take to be this:—"No man," says Christ, "can believe the doctrines, or obey the precepts, which I teach, except he is enabled by the assistance and grace of God:" by which we are not to understand any sudden irresistible impulse, as some enthusiasts would persuade us; but, except God shall be pleased to dispose his heart, and also the circumstances

circumstances of his situation, in such a manner as to draw him into the right road of faith and obedience. This is the declaration of Christ, and the doctrine universally enforced by all the writers of the New Testament. St. Paul says, “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God *.” He says also to the Philipians, “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do, of his good pleasure †”. This is the constant language of the scriptures; in which we are every where exhorted to seek, to depend on, to hope for, and to pray for this divine influence on our thoughts and actions, as necessary to our thinking any thing right, or performing any thing good: and yet we are constantly considered, by the whole tenour of those writings, as free agents, possessed of perfect liberty to do good or evil, and as such we are instructed, admonished, tempted by rewards, and threatened with punishments. How contradic-

* 2 Cor. iii. 5.

† Phil. ii. 13.

tory soever these two propositions may seem, they are both undoubtedly true. Of the first we cannot fail of being convinced by reason, nor of the latter by experience. Reason assures us, that no creature can think or act independant of his Creator, in whom he lives, and moves, and has his being, and from whom he receives power to think or act at all ; and it seems indeed impossible that a Creator, however omnipotent, should bestow on his creatures such a degree of freedom as to make them independent of himself : for he must infuse into their original frames some dispositions, good or bad ; he must give them reason superior to their passions, or passions uncontrouled by their reason ; he must endue them with a greater or less degree of wisdom or folly ; he must place them within or beyond the reach of temptations, and within the view of virtuous or vicious examples. All these circumstances must proceed from his dispensations, and from these their elections
and

and consequent conduct must be derived. Of the latter, which is, that we are possessed of full liberty to choose good or evil, to do, or forbear doing, any action; every moment's experience assures us with equal certainty. This is not a matter of argument, but of feeling; and we can no more doubt of our being possessed of this power, than of our sight, hearing, or any of our corporeal senses.

How these two contradictory propositions can be reconciled, is above the reach of our comprehensions, and is but another mark, added to many, of their weakness and imperfection. We have no faculties which are able to solve this difficulty, and therefore ought to leave it to that omniscient Being who framed, and is alone acquainted with the composition of the human mind. Each of these opinions has been supported by different sects of philosophers, with equal warmth; but it is remarkable, that the Christian is the only religious or
moral

moral institution which ever ventured to assert the truth of them both; which, as they are both undoubtedly true, seems no inconsiderable proof of the supernatural information and authority of that dispensation.

JOHN

JOHN VI. 53.

Εἶπεν ἐν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησὺς· Ἀμην ἀμην λεγὼ ὑμῖν, ἐὰν μὴ φαγῇτε τὴν σὰρκα τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, καὶ πινῇτε αὐτοῦ τὸ αἷμα, ἔκ ἐχετε ζωὴν ἐν αἰῶσις.

Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.

THES E remarkable words of Christ, being the very same which he afterwards used in the institution of the sacrament of his last supper, we cannot but conclude that they must have the same meaning. Modern expositors have, indeed, in both places, explained them in such a manner, as to leave them no meaning at all; they would persuade us, that they are merely figurative and metaphorical, and think, by eating the body, and drinking the blood of Christ, nothing more is to be understood, than

than being intimately united to him, by believing his doctrines and obeying his precepts ; and that, when applied to the bread and wine received in the sacrament, they mean only that these are symbols of his sufferings and death. But they are surely too expressive, too much insisted on, and too often repeated, to admit of so cold an interpretation ; nor is it credible that Christ would have made use of an expression for the sake of metaphor, which shocked his hearers, offended his disciples, and has produced the most violent contentions amongst them from that time to the present hour.

The Evangelists who heard them, and have so emphatically recorded them, had very different ideas of the importance of these words, and so had St. Paul, who reproved the Corinthians who received unworthily, by not discerning the Lord's body ; that is, by not perceiving that they were then not eating and drinking bread and wine as their daily food, but something which, by powers supernaturally annexed to

it, would produce the most important effects on their present dispositions and future happiness. Our first reformers, though they rejected transubstantiation, yet retained the highest veneration for this sacrament, the sanctity of the elements, and the importance of their effects on the communicants ; and I am inclined to think, that they understood the sense of the scriptures better, and the true spirit of Christianity more correctly, than our present reformers of reformation. These set up reason as the measure of truth, and then pare away the scriptures to make them fit it : those searched them with diligence and candour, to find out their true and genuine significations, without any regard to the decisions of human reason ; from hence they formed their opinions and doctrines, and from them their creeds and articles ; and on this principle we ought to subscribe them—by which we do not assert their truth, but their conformity to the sense of the scriptures, which they were intended to explain : the truth and
authority

authority of those writings is another question.

Several of our modern divines represent the sacrament of the Lord's supper as a mere commemoration of his sufferings and death; by which they entirely destroy the end and intent of it: for, although this is a positive institution, it is of a moral nature, because it is designed to drive the wicked into repentance and amendment; and for this purpose it is most admirably contrived, because, if they have not totally rejected the Christian scheme, it lays them under insuperable difficulties, as it obliges them either to augment their guilt, by the neglect of a positive command, or, by obeying it without repentance and reformation, to ratify their own condemnation. But if these very extraordinary words of Christ have no meaning, or mean nothing more than a bare commemoration—if consecration confers no sanctity on the bread and wine—if those who receive them worthily receive no benefit, nor those who receive them unworthily in-

cur no danger—the institution is vain and useless, and has no more concern with our religion or morals than the commemoration of gunpowder treason, or of any other event recorded in the history of former times.—Although, therefore, we cannot believe, in contradiction to our senses, that by these emphatical words of Christ the material substance of the elements is changed; yet, surely, we may believe, without the imputation of credulity, that they have some meaning; and that, by them, powers, property, and effects may be annexed to the proper use of the sacrament, which may greatly contribute to our obtaining pardon for our past offences, prevent us from falling into future transgressions, and essentially assist us in our progress to everlasting life.

JOHN

JOHN VII. 46.

Οὐδεποῖε ἔτως ἐλάλησεν ἄνθρωπος, ὥς οὗτος ὁ
ἄνθρωπος.

Never man spake like this man.

I HAVE always been of opinion, that the most convincing proof of the divine authority of the Christian revelation may be drawn from the originality of its doctrines, precepts, and the character of its author. This religion teaches us, that mankind come into the world in a state of depravity, guilt, and condemnation, from which they cannot be redeemed, but by the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, together with their own sincere repentance, reformation, and faith in him; and that, on these terms, God will accept his sufferings and death, as an atonement for their sins; but that these terms they are unable to comply with, without the superintendency of his grace and assistance, although they are endued with

perfect free-will, and are accountable for the use of it.—All these doctrines are so entirely new, that they had never entered into the head of any one before, and never any man, but this man, had thought or spake any thing like them. Imposture always puts on the garb of truth, and resembles her as near as she can; but in all these propositions there appears not even a pretence to probability, and therefore, as they cannot be invention, we may reasonably conclude that they must be true.

The moral precepts of this institution are, indeed, similar to those of all others; but in this respect they also are entirely new, that they are carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection, than was ever thought of by the legislators and philosophers of preceding ages. They had some distant prospect of a future state of rewards and punishments, but they saw it through a glass darkly, obscured by clouds of doubt and uncertainty; but this man spake of it with
certainty

certainty and authority, removed all the intervening clouds, and shewed it in the clearest day-light.

The character of the great author of this dispensation, is not less new than the religion itself; there is no instance, in the history of mankind, of the founder of a religion, who proposed by it no benefit to himself, as well as to the world, who intended not to acquire wealth, power, and dominion over his followers; nor an institution in the construction of which this intention is not evidently visible. But Christ disavows all pretences to such acquisitions, chose nothing for himself, and promised nothing to his disciples but poverty, disgrace, sufferings, and death.

The progress of this religion was equally new and unprecedented with all the rest; for in the course of a few years it triumphed over all opposition, from reason and philosophy, from principalities and powers, and spread itself over all the most civilized and learned countries then in the world.

Q 3

This

This verified the wise prediction of Gamaliel ; who said to the High-priest, desirous of persecuting the Apostles, " Let them alone ;
 " for if this counsel or work be of men, it
 " will come to nought ; but if it be of God,
 " ye cannot overthrow it *."

* Acts v. 38, 39.

JOHN

JOHN VIII. 57, 58.

Εἶπον ἔν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι πρὸς αὐτόν· Πεντη-
κόντα ἔτη ἔπω ἔχεις, καὶ Ἀβραὰμ ἐώρακας;

Εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησὺς· Ἀμην ἀμην λέγω
ὑμῖν, πρὶν Ἀβραὰμ γενεσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμι.

*Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not
yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abra-
ham?*

*Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say
unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.*

IN this short reply of Jesus to the Jews,
there is something exceedingly remark-
able; of which the commentators have taken
no notice, though it is surprising that so un-
common an expression should have escaped
their observation.

Had he said, “Before Abraham was, I
“was,” the obvious meaning would have
been no more than this, that he had existed
from all eternity, and consequently before
the time of Abraham, though he had not

made his appearance in this world before that age which was then present ; but the extraordinary phrase here used, by applying the present tense to a past event, must imply a great deal more, and refer to the mode of that eternal existence. It seems, indeed, to amount to a plain declaration, that eternal existence is permanent and unsuccessive ; not composed of days, and months, and years, like ours in the present life, but one fixed unchangeable point, bearing no relation to time at all ; which we have no faculty to comprehend, nor language to express.

If this is the true nature of eternity, of which I have no doubt, this extraordinary declaration is no inconsiderable proof of the supernatural information of this extraordinary teacher ; because, in the ages and situation in which he lived, he never could have acquired such an idea by any human means.

JOHN

J O H N . XVIII. 40.

Ἐκραυγασαν ἐν παλιν πάντες, λεγοντες·
Μη τῆτον, ἀλλὰ τον Βαραββαν· ἦν δὲ ὁ Βα-
ραββας ληστης.

*Then cried they all again, saying, Not this
man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a
robber.*

IT has frequently been well observed, that the Supreme disposer of all things never interposes a supernatural power, whenever his designs can be accomplished by ordinary means; that is, by the passions and actions of free beings; the effects of which are as certain and uniform, as those of matter and motion; and which, though to us not so visible, are as accurately known by him, who is perfectly acquainted with their frames and dispositions, from whence their actions must inevitably be derived.

This is remarkably exemplified in the Evangelical history of the life and death
of

of Jesus Christ ; in which we see that, in order to ascertain his divine mission, and give a sanctity to the religion which he taught, miraculous works were every day performed, because this could not have been effected without them ; but the whole progress of his persecutions, sufferings, and death, were left to the ordinary operations of the malevolence, wickedness, and ignorance of mankind, the usual instruments which Providence employed to bring about the most important events : and by these we find that *this*, the most important of all others, was effected, without the assistance of any supernatural power ; for no sooner did Jesus enter upon his benevolent office of instructing and reforming mankind, than he was misunderstood by some, and misrepresented by others ; he was reviled, insulted, and persecuted, his doctrines were called blasphemy, and his miracles imputed to the devil. In a little time the Jewish priesthood (apprehensive from his preaching of danger to their church) and the civil magistrates

gistrates (fearful of insurrection in the state) united to destroy him. False witnesses were suborned to accuse him, and one of his own disciples was corrupted to betray him. He was then brought before the judgment-seat of a Roman governor, who, though he declared that he found no fault in him, yet (fearing to offend the most powerful part of the nation over which he presided, and still more overawed by the name of Cæsar) preferred his own interest to the protection of friendless innocence, and condemned him to a cruel and ignominious death. But it being customary, at this time of the passover, to release one malefactor at the requisition of the people, and there being now one under sentence of condemnation, called Barabbas, this timid judge proposed an option to the populace, which of them he should release, hoping that they would do that justice which he himself had not courage to perform. But here a meek and virtuous character had no chance, in a competition for popularity with one who, though a robber,

had

had been the ringleader of an insurrection; and therefore they all cried out, again and again, "Not this man, but Barabbas." All this was but the ordinary process of human wickedness, ignorance, and malevolence; and no miraculous interference appears in any part of this transaction, because none was wanted. For, certainly, no miracle is requisite to produce opposers of truth, enemies to reformation, persecutors of innocence, and magistracy tenacious of their authority; a priesthood jealous of their power, a servant bribed to betray his master, false witnesses, a self-interested judge, and a profligate and misled populace. These are the growth of every age and country in the world, and were fully sufficient to accomplish this important and astonishing event; and will ever remain a remarkable instance, that the worst actions of the worst of men are sometimes made use of, by the power and wisdom of God, to carry into execution his most beneficent and salutary designs.

J O H N

J O H N XX. 29.

Λεγει αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησους· Ὅτι ἑώρακας με,
Θωμα, πεπιστευκας· μακαριοι οἱ μὴ ἰδοντες,
καὶ πιστευσαντες.

*Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou
hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they
that have not seen, and yet have believed.*

WHAT! says the self-sufficient rea-
soner, are those the most blessed
who believe without proof? And is the me-
rit of faith greater, in proportion as the evi-
dence for it is less?—To such querists I
shall only answer, That they understand not
the nature of faith, nor in what the merit of
it consists. In the mere assent to a propo-
sition, there is no merit; because, if the
proof is obscure, it is weakness; if clear, it
is compulsion. It is not the *act*, but the
disposition, which places faith so high in
the catalogue of Christian virtues, and ren-
ders infidelity so criminal. One of the chief
characteristics

characteristics of Christian charity is, that it believeth all things; because this readiness to believe must proceed from an humble, submissive, and teachable temper. Whereas incredulity, when the evidence is sufficient, generally arises from men's vices, and at best, from a self-conceited, suspicious, and untractable disposition, which is utterly incompatible with the whole tenour of that religion. This seems to have been the case of St. Thomas; who is here reproved for not believing the resurrection of Christ, on the positive and unanimous testimony of all the Apostles (with whose honesty and veracity he was perfectly acquainted, and had no reason to question) because he had not seen him with his own eyes, and felt him with his own hands: and, perhaps, he was not indulged with so incontestible proof as the rest had been, in order to try and correct this incredulous and suspicious disposition. If this was really the fact, we may from thence reasonably conclude, that many things are communicated to us, in the scriptures,

tures, in a manner not so perfectly clear and demonstrative as they might have been, for the same cause, that is, to try and cultivate in us a disposition so necessary in the composition of a Christian.

ROMANS

ROMANS VIII. 29.

Ὅτι ἔς προέγνω, καὶ προώρισε συμμορφῆς τῆς
εἰκόνος τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ.

*For whom he did foreknow, he also did pre-
destinate.*

MUCH unnecessary labour has been employed, by many learned divines and metaphysicians, to reconcile the foreknowledge of God and the free-will of man; which never can be at variance, because they have nothing to do with each other. The Apostle here says, “Whom he “did foreknow, he also did predestinate;” that is, Those whom he foreknew would be wicked, he foreknows will be punished; and those whom he foresees will be righteous, he foresees also will be rewarded: but they are not wicked and punished, or righteous and rewarded, because he foreknows it; but he foreknows it because they are so. It is impossible but that an omniscient Being,

“ in whom we live, and move, and have
 “ our being,” must foresee all our thoughts
 and actions, and the consequences which
 attend them, and therefore must fore-
 know our destination in the present, and
 in a future life : but his foreknowledge
 is not the cause of it, nor in the least con-
 trouls the freedom of our elections, in which
 we enjoy as perfect liberty as if they were
 totally unknown ; for the mere knowledge
 of one being, cannot possibly have any in-
 fluence on the actions of another. If any
 man is well acquainted with the dispositions
 of another, he may nearly guess how he will
 conduct himself on any occasion ; if he
 knows they are profligate and prodigal,
 he may reasonably conclude that he will
 destroy his health, waste his fortune, and die
 in an hospital or a gaol ; this accordingly
 happens, but not because he had foreseen
 it ; that could not be the cause of this man’s
 misbehaviour or misfortune ; which could
 be derived only from his own folly and
 extravagance. What is but conjecture in

man, in God is certain prescience; but the elections of free agents are no more controuled by the one than the other.—In this, I perceive nothing abstruse, difficult, or in the least inconsistent with the justice of God, or the free-will of man. The cause of all our embarrassments on this subject I take to be this :—From the nature of human conceptions and human language, we are under the necessity of applying ideas and expressions, relative to time, to the existence, the attributes, and actions of the Supreme Being; with which they have no kind of relation; which leads us into innumerable absurdities in our speculations on this subject. With God there is no past, present, and to come: he knows all things equally at all times, and therefore cannot properly be said to foreknow or predestinate any thing. This foreknowledge may be to him predestination; but with regard to us, as it affects not our conduct, it is in a moral sense absolutely nothing.

ROMANS

ROMANS XIII. 1, 2.

Πασα ψυχη ἐξουσιαις ὑπερεχουσαις ὑποτασσесθω. Οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν ἐξουσία εἰ μὴ ἀπὸ Θεοῦ· αἱ δὲ εἶναι ἐξουσιαι, ὑπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ τεταγμεναι εἰσιν.

Ὡς ὁ ἀντιτασσομεν τῇ ἐξουσίᾳ, τῇ τοῦ Θεοῦ διαταγῇ ἀνδρῆσθην· οἱ δὲ ἀνδρῆσθηκοτες, ἑαυτοῖς κριμα ληψονται.

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers : for there is no power but of God ; the powers that be are ordained of God.

Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God : and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

THROUGHOUT the whole New Testament we find, that both Christ and his Apostles were particularly careful to avoid giving any instructions concerning government, and on all subjects of a political nature ; an example which the preachers of his gospel would do well to imitate

in all times. The passage here before us is almost the only deviation from this general rule, and is a strong instance of the wisdom and necessity of this extraordinary caution ; for, although it is nothing more than a general exhortation to obedience, it has at all times been perverted to speak the language, and serve the iniquitous purposes, of contending parties. The advocates for arbitrary power, and flatterers of princes, have endeavoured to prove from it, that all sovereigns are vested, by divine appointment, with uncontrollable authority, accountable for the use of it to God alone, from whom they receive it ; which no subject, however oppressed, can resist, without resisting the ordinance of God, and incurring a punishment due to so presumptuous a crime. —On the other side, the friends of liberty, who are enemies to all power in any hands but their own, connect these words with those in the succeeding verse, which declare, that “ rulers are not a terror “ to good works, but to the evil ;” and from
thence

thence would persuade us, that whenever a government is so much perverted from its original design, as to become a terror to good works, and not to evil (that is, whenever it is unjustly and tyrannically administered) it becomes then not only our right, but our duty, to resist it. But in this, as in most controversies, both sides are in the wrong; for, if the arguments of the former were universally to prevail, there could be no liberty, if of the latter, no government, upon earth; but certainly Christianity never intended to make men either slaves or rebels. We have here a wise and salutary injunction from St. Paul, to his disciples then at Rome, to submit quietly to any government under which they lived, without making any nice inquiry into the rights of those who govern, or factious objections to their administration; which is not in the least dispensed with by the following words; that "rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil;" which are added as a farther argument to induce all good men to

submit to and support government, because it is instituted for their protection ; and we cannot suppose that the Apostle could mean by them to furnish the Christians with an excuse for disobedience, as his whole intention is clearly to enjoin them to submit peaceably to the Roman government, which was then, in the truest sense, a terror to good works, and not to evil ; and particularly to their good works, for which they were daily oppressed and persecuted. The doctrine of St. Paul is plainly this, That every man ought to be subject to the powers that be (that is, to the established government of the country in which he lives) for this wise and pious reason, because all power must be derived from the appointment, or at least from the permission, of God ; and this not only for wrath, but for conscience sake, (that is, not only for fear of incurring the displeasure of that government, but as a duty required by him). This also is the doctrine of Christ himself, which he enforced, both by his precepts and example, on all occasions.

occasions. When Pilate said unto him, "Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?" he answered, "Thou couldst have no power against me, except it was given thee from above;" and therefore he submitted.

There may be cases in which resistance of the supreme power may be justified by necessity, but such ought never to be defined or pointed out before their arrival; when they come, they will speak for themselves, and men will be ready enough to hear them. Resistance may sometimes be practised, but ought never to be preached, for we stand in need of no lessons to teach us disobedience; and therefore we do not find, throughout the whole New Testament, one definition or recommendation of civil liberty, nor one command to fight or die in its defence. These may be the glorious achievements of heroes and patriots; but these are not listed under the banners of Christ; the glory, as well as the duty, of his disci-

ples are, to suffer and submit.—We should remember also, that by resistance, not only force and open rebellion is here to be understood, but all secret machinations, and all turbulent and factious endeavours to distress and impede government, arising from motives of self-interest, ambition, or disappointment. These are, in fact, rebellion, with this only difference, that they are more treacherous and cowardly, more likely to succeed, and less to be punished, and are therefore equally forbid under the denunciation of the same tremendous penalty.

I CORINTHIANS I. 10.

Παρακαλῶ δε ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, δια τῆς ὀνομαζομένης Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἵνα τὸ αὐτὸ λέγῃτε πάντες, καὶ μὴ ᾗ ἐν ὑμῖν σχισμὰ.

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you.

FROM these words of St. Paul, it is evident, that many different opinions, and many controversies concerning them, had found their way into the Christian churches, at so early a period as his lifetime. These he endeavoured to suppress, by thus enjoining them to speak the same things; that is, to settle some uniform rule of faith and mode of worship, ascertained by something like creeds or articles, to which they could all assent; without which, no rule of faith, or form of worship, could be established, nor divisions amongst them be prevented,

vented, destructive to every community civil or religious. It is true, indeed, that at the first promulgation of the gospel, Christ himself imposed no such on his disciples, who chiefly consisted of the most ignorant and illiterate vulgar, from whom nothing more was required than the bare acknowledgment that he was the Son of God, or the Messiah, who had been long expected. As this is but a single proposition, no difference of opinion concerning it could arise amongst those who believed, and therefore there could be no occasion for any tests to reconcile them. In a little time the great, the wise, and the learned sages and philosophers became profelytes, and brought with them a variety of opinions from their respective schools in which they had been educated; which were blended with the doctrines of Christ, and very soon corrupted the purity of his religion. It then became necessary to fix some standard of truth, to which every Christian might resort; and when these doctrines were committed to writing,

ing, in the books of the New Testament, from the uncertainty of all human language, and the various interpretations which they will admit of, this necessity was greatly increased, and is daily increasing by time, which every day introduces new errors, and new disputes about them; so that it seems impossible, that, without some test, any religion can be established in any country; and without some establishment no national religion can subsist at all.

Hence appears the absurdity of those who would reject all religious tests, because Christ imposed none on his disciples when there were no errors to encounter nor controversies to decide, and therefore none were wanted: to reject them now, because they were then unnecessary, is as ridiculous as to explode the use of all medicines, because none were administered before any diseases had made their appearance. But, say some, If tests are necessary, let them be as comprehensive as possible; a declaration that we believe the scriptures, would be fully sufficient.

ficient. They ought, undoubtedly, to be as comprehensive as the end of their institution will admit; which is, to exclude all those from a community, whose principles must induce them to betray and subvert it: but such a declaration would, by no means, answer this purpose, because our disputes are not about the truth, but the meaning, of those writings; and we see many who believe, or pretend to believe, them, and yet deny their assent to every material doctrine which they contain, and justify their dissent by their own interpretations: a test, therefore, must specify and decide upon the particular doctrines which are disputed, or it is entirely useless and ineffectual. Such are the articles of our church, interpretations of the sense of the scriptures, and explanations of the doctrines therein contained; as such only we subscribe them, not as objects of our reason or belief, any farther than we believe them to be so. This, surely, is very different from asserting their truth in the first instance; this depends on the veracity of the books

books which they profess to explain; and this on many other different considerations, as the authenticity of those writings, the inspiration, and degrees of inspiration, of their authors, and the purity of their preservation; with all which, in subscribing to these articles, we have nothing to do. All that is incumbent on us is, to compare them with the books themselves, which, if we fairly and candidly perform, I am persuaded, we shall find them more consonant with their real and genuine sense, and more expressive of their true meaning, than modern theological language and ideas will admit of. The compilers never considered whether they are conformable to reason; if they expressed the true sense of the scriptures, this was all they intended.

I CORINTHIANS I. 25.

Ὅτι τὸ μῶρον τῆ Θεοῦ, σοφωτερον των ἀνθρώπων ἐστίν.

The foolishness of God is wiser than men.

THERE is something, at first sight, in this expression, indecent, if not impious; but it means no more than this; that the doctrines of Christianity, revealed by God, though they were “to the Jews a “stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness,” are wiser (that is, better fitted to instruct mankind in the principles of true religion and sound morality) than all the theological lessons of the Rabbis of the one, or the Philosophers of the other. St. Paul, who says this, was, perhaps, as great a master of reason as any man of his own or of all succeeding ages; but he never employed it on subjects to which it cannot properly be applied: he never endeavours by it to explain the mysteries of the Christian religion,

or

or to reject them because he is not able ; he believed them himself, and taught them to others, just as they had been delivered by his Lord and master, without attempting to reconcile them to his own reason, or that of his disciples.

Christ frequently declared, that all mankind come into this world in a state of depravity, guilt, and condemnation ; that he was the Messiah, or the Son of God, who came to instruct and reform them, and to lay down his life as a propitiation for their transgressions ; and that his heavenly Father, on their sincere repentance, would accept his sufferings and death as an atonement for their sins : that they were free agents, and as such accountable for their conduct ; and yet constantly asserts, that they can do nothing of themselves, but that all their thoughts and actions must proceed from the influence of God, “ in whom they live, and move, and have their being.” These doctrines appeared to the learned philosophers of Rome and Athens
to

to be foolishness (that is, absurdities, contradictory to every principle of human reason) and so they must have done to St. Paul, had he brought them before the same tribunal; but he never presumed to set up human reason as a judge of divine dispensations. He pretended not to controvert the truth of these doctrines, by arguing, that it was never possible that a wise, benevolent, and just Creator should call into being creatures in a state of depravity, guilt, and condemnation, and punish them for what they could not prevent; nor that, if they could be criminal, he should accept the sufferings of the innocent as a satisfaction for the crimes of the guilty: nor did he alledge, that Omnipotence itself could not create beings at the same time free agents, yet under perpetual influence and direction: all these doubts and difficulties he left to the discussion of the reasoning divines and philosophers of later ages; for himself, he was satisfied of the truth of these doctrines, by the authority from whence they were derived;

rived ; and as such, has transmitted them to us, in words as clear and explicit as the power of language can furnish. He does not attempt to explain these mysteries, nor enters into any metaphysical speculations on the abstract nature of guilt and punishment, of sufferings or atonement, of free will, predestination, and divine influence. He asserts the facts only as he received them ; which is all of which, in our present state, we can be informed.

I CORINTHIANS VII. 27.

Λελυσαι ἀπο γυναικος; μη ζητει γυναικα.

Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife.

ST. Paul, throughout this whole chapter, recommends celibacy to Christians of both sexes, as most acceptable to God, and most consistent with the purity of their religion. Commentators, I know, in order to extricate themselves from some difficulties, have represented this advice but as local and temporal, occasioned only by the distresses and persecutions under which the Christian churches at that time laboured: but, if we believe his own words, we must see that this was not his only, nor yet his principal reason for giving it; but that he meant it generally, because he was of opinion that marriage, in Christians of both sexes, multiplied their attachments, and increased their cares concerning worldly affairs, and consequently diverted their attention from the
sole

sole object of their profession, which is the attainment of everlasting life. He says, "I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things which belong to the Lord; but he that is married careth for the things of the world, how he may please his wife.—The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit; but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband." For this reason, St. Paul here ventures to avow a doctrine contradictory to the moral and political sentiments of the wisest philosophers and legislators of all times, destructive of domestic happiness and national prosperity, and which, if universally adopted, would eradicate the human species from the face of the earth.

From hence, if we believe that this great Apostle understood the spirit of the religion which he taught, we cannot avoid drawing this conclusion—That there may be actions,

the performance of which may essentially contribute to raise individuals nearer to Christian perfection, and to qualify them for happiness in a future life, which may yet widely differ, both in their principles and their end, from moral virtues, and which, if universally practised, would be exceedingly detrimental to mankind in their present state.

Of these celibacy is one; which, though destructive of the happiness, and even of the existence of mankind, may yet give leisure to some few individuals to carry their piety, devotion, virtue, and resignation, to a more exalted height than can be arrived at, under the many cares, connections, and embarrassments incident to the married state. In like manner, to sell all that a man hath, and give it to the poor, is an act which, if generally practised, must put an end to all trade, manufactures, and industry, and introduce universal idleness and want; yet, the performance of it must proceed from so extraordinary a degree of faith, obedience, and self-denial,

self-denial, that it may deserve, and receive, an extraordinary reward. Precepts of this sort, I apprehend, are not enjoined, but only occasionally flung out, to teach us the nature of Christian perfection; which is so adverse to the world, and all its œconomy, pursuits, and occupations, that we are neither required or expected to attain it in our present state, but ought to make as near approaches to it as our natural depravity and imperfection will permit.

From hence I am inclined to think, that, if monastic institutions were really what they pretend to be, voluntary retreats from all worldly cares, occupations, and connections, wholly appropriated to religious contemplation, piety, and devotion, they might confer very essential benefits on the very few individuals who are capable of receiving them, without any detriment to the business or population of the world. But the great objection to them is this—that they are not made for man, nor man for them. The generality of mankind are formed for

action, and not for contemplation, and come into the world to do its business, without perceiving the folly and insignificance of what they are employed in. If multitudes, therefore, are confined in these gloomy mansions, in contradiction to their inclinations and dispositions, they must soon become, like other prisons, seminaries of ignorance, laziness, profligacy, and vice.

I CORINTHIANS XIII. 4, 5, 6, 7.

Ἡ ἀγάπη μακροθυμει, χρηστευεται· ἡ ἀγάπη ἐζηλοῖ· ἡ ἀγάπη ἐπερπερευεται, ἐφυσισται,

ἐκ ἀσχημονει, ἐζητει τὰ ἑαυτης, ἐπαροξυνέται, ἐλογιζεται τὸ κακόν,

ἐχαίρει ἐπὶ τῇ ἀδικίᾳ, συγχαίρει δὲ τῇ ἀληθείᾳ.

πάντα σεγει, πάντα πιστευει, πάντα ἐλπίζει, πάντα ὑπομενει.

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

IN this inimitable portrait of Charity, drawn by the masterly hand of St. Paul,

we find every virtue which constitutes the character of a Christian, who is a candidate for the kingdom of heaven ; in which it is remarkable, that there is not one, which is not peculiarly calculated to qualify men to become members, and to enjoy and contribute to the felicity, of that holy and happy society.

“ Charity suffereth long, and is kind ;” that is, is patient, meek, and benevolent, qualities the most essential to social happiness. “ Charity envieth not ;” for, as the envious are miserable, in proportion to the happiness they see others enjoy, they would be more miserable in heaven than they are upon earth. “ Charity vaunteth not itself, “ is not puffed up ;” because nothing so much disturbs the peace of society, as pride, insolence, and ambition. “ Doth not behave itself unseemly ;” that is, is not in conversation ill-bred, self-sufficient, disputatious, and overbearing ; offences, perhaps, more adverse to social happiness, than many crimes of a more enormous kind. “ Seeketh “ not her own, is not easily provoked ;” that
is,

is, rather chuses to give up some part of her property, to which she has an undoubted right, than be the cause of contests, animosities, and litigations, and is not easily provoked to enter into them, either by interests or resentment. “Thinketh no evil;” that is, suspects no evil intentions in the hearts of others, as she feels none in her own. “Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;” that is, takes no pleasure in any kind of wickedness, nor sees it with approbation in others; but is happy in the practice of every virtue which is prescribed by reason and truth, and rejoiceth to see others follow her example. “Beareth all things,” all injuries and insults, without anger, or a wish for revenge or retaliation. “Believeth all things,” because meek, docile, diffident of her own judgment, and unsuspicious of fraud and imposition. “Hopeth all things,” however unfavourable are their present appearances, will turn out for the best; and therefore “endureth all things,” pain, sickness, poverty, and misfortunes, with patience, and perfect resignation to the will of God.

We

We have here a compleat catalogue of all those virtues and dispositions, which are necessary to qualify a Christian for the kingdom of heaven; in any one of which, if he is deficient, he must infallibly be excluded, however eminent his merits may be of another kind; of this the same Apostle assures us, who says, “ Though I speak with the
 “ tongues of men and angels, and have not
 “ charity, I am become as sounding brass, or
 “ a tinkling cymbal; and though I have the
 “ gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and though I
 “ have all faith, so that I could remove
 “ mountains, and have not charity, I am
 “ nothing. And though I bestow all my
 “ goods to feed the poor, and though I
 “ give my body to be burned, and have not
 “ charity, it profiteth me nothing;” that is, in regard to my attainment of the kingdom of heaven; because there neither eloquence, nor prophecy, nor theological knowledge, nor faith, nor martyrdom, nor bounty to the poor, are wanted; but only such a
 5 meek,

meek, humble, patient, peaceable, forgiving, and benevolent temper and behaviour, as is here specified under the denomination of charity, which alone can enable us to communicate and participate happiness, either in the present or a future state.

I CORINTHIANS XIII. II.

Ὅτε ἤμην νηπιῶν, ὡς νηπιῶν ἐλάλουν, ὡς νηπιῶν ἐφρονεῖν, ὡς νηπιῶν ἐλογίζομην· ὅτε δὲ γεγονα ἄνθρωπος, κατήργηκα τὰ τῶν νηπιῶν.

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

IF we trace a man through the different periods of his life, from the cradle to the grave, he appears in such a variety of shapes, that we can scarcely believe him to be the same creature. At first he is an helpless infant in his nurse's arms, without speech, understanding, or thought; then he is a child, speaking as a child, understanding as a child, thinking as a child. He is next a rude, unformed, impetuous school-boy; and then transformed into a youth, graceful, amiable, and amorous. At length, arrived at com-
pleat

pleat manhood, he puts away childish things, and becomes a philosopher, a warrior, or a statesman. We then find him measuring out the heavens, investigating other worlds, or busied in the occupations of this. We see him commanding fleets or armies, or haranguing at the bar, in the pulpit, or the senate; and at last returning back to his primitive state of childhood and imbecility. Yet, under all these characters, he is but the same single individual.

In what this identity consists, or where it resides, it is by no means easy to ascertain. It cannot be in the body, because every naturalist knows that the component parts of the body are in perpetual motion, are continually discharged by various evacuations, and replaced by the particles of our daily food; so that, in the course of a few years, not a single atom of our original frame can possibly remain. If a man loses a leg or an arm, or even both
legs

legs and arms, he is not less the same person ; and therefore we have reason to conclude, that his identity would not be affected by the loss of his whole body ; and therefore in that it cannot reside.

It cannot be in the mind, because the changes of the mind are as great and as frequent as those of the body, throughout the different stages of human life ; the ideas of a man and those of a child are as unlike as his features and his stature ; at different ages we put away all our former modes of thinking and acting, and adopt new opinions, pursuits, inclinations, and attachments. Many diseases destroy all our mental faculties, derange our reason, extinguish our consciousness, and obliterate our memories ; and yet our identity remains unimpaired. If, therefore, it is not to be found either in the body or the mind, there must be some permanent principle in the human composition, in which it does reside, totally unaffected

unaffected by the continual alterations of them both ;—and this, I think, is a new and unanswerable proof of the existence and duration of the soul.

I CORINTHIANS XIII. 12.

Βλεπομεν γαρ ἀρτι δι' ἑσοπλῆς ἐν αἰνιγματι.

For now we see through a glass, darkly.

SO darkly, indeed, do we see the things of a future life, and so erroneously those of the present, that we form very false estimates of them both; and act still more absurdly than we judge. There are, who not convinced that there will be a future state of retribution after death, and none who know not that the death of every man may be instantaneous, and cannot be far off; and yet they take no care to prepare themselves for the former, and think so little of the latter, that, on any unexpected event, it is become proverbial to say, I thought of it no more than of my dying day. We fear nothing so much as death; and yet there is nothing which we think of so little. We are more tenacious of riches the less we want them, and toil away the best part of our
our

our days to enable us to pass a few in a quiet leisure, which no man could ever enjoy who had ever been busy. We infuse into our children the same false ideas, and thus transmit absurdities from generation to generation. We educate them all for this life; there is not one school for the next. "What man is there of you," says Christ, "who, if his son ask for a fish, will give him
 * "a serpent*?" few, indeed, with regard to this world, are so foolish or so cruel, but, with regard to another, it is universally practised. Every prudent parent endeavours to infuse into his son the wisdom of the serpent, rather than the innocence of the fish. He spares no pains to qualify them for the highest posts in the kingdom of the earth, but his ambition extends not, like that of the mother of Zebedee, to gain them rank in the kingdom of heaven. Do we hear any father, however worthy and respectable, thus address his son, in the lan-

* Matt. vii. 10.

guage of a philosopher and a Christian ? I shall leave you, my son, an estate, small indeed in the estimation of the world, but sufficient to afford you, not only the necessities but the comforts of life, and even to administer them to the wants of others : waste it not in vice and extravagance, nor yet labour to increase it by frauds and rapine, nor even by honest industry in professions which will not allow you leisure, either to enjoy this life or prepare for another ; but, above all other methods, seek not to augment it by a mercenary marriage, which cannot fail to lead you into an inextricable labyrinth of wickedness and misery ; and remember, that mutual fidelity and affection will give you more happiness than wealth is able to bestow.

The very reverse of this is the lesson inculcated by every prudent parent, and ratified by universal approbation.—My son, he says, you will inherit an ample fortune ; but let not this tempt you to sit down quietly in an indolent insignificance : there are
a variety

a variety of methods by which you may improve it, and advance yourself in the world; by a discreet marriage, you may double it, if you do not foolishly sacrifice your interests; the law, the church, and the army are all open to your endeavours, and may reward them with the highest posts of honour and profit: the East and the West are still unexhausted, and ready to pour their treasures into the laps of the brave and enterprising. By such instructions are the seeds of avarice and ambition sown in the minds of youth, which afterwards infallibly produce the bitter fruits of iniquity and disappointment.

That mankind should thus continue, through all ages and generations, to think, speak, and act in contradiction to their reason, their principles, and their interest, is a wonderful phænomenon; which can be occasioned solely by this single circumstance, that they “see through a glass, “darkly:” whenever they see clearly, they seldom judge wrong; the defect is not in

their reason, but in their knowledge ; every one would pursue his own interest, if he knew what it was, and, in fact, every one does pursue it, but the generality totally mistake it. No man would choose riches before happiness, power before quiet, or fame before safety, if he knew the true value of each : no man would prefer the transitory and worthless enjoyment of this world to the permanent and sublime felicity of a better, if he had a clear prospect of them both ; but we see the former through a mist, which always magnifies, and the latter appears to be at so great a distance, that we scarce see it at all ; and therefore it makes little impression on our senses, and has as little influence on our conduct.

Why our all-wise and benevolent Creator should have thought proper thus to present all objects to our view, “ through a glass, “ darkly,” is one of the many divine dispensations for which we are unable to account ; but this we may know, that if we saw the things of this world clearly, and in
a true

a true light, the business and œconomy of it, constituted as it is, could not go on ; our pursuits would all be at an end, when we saw there was nothing worth pursuing, our hopes would vanish, our expectations be extinguished, and an universal stagnation would ensue : and from hence we have reason to conclude, that a distinct prospect of the things of another world, while we reside in this, would be equally detrimental to the well-being of both.

PHILIPPIANS IV. 8.

Το λοιπον, ἀδελφοι, ὅσα ἐσιν ἀληθη, ὅσα σεμνα, ὅσα δικαια, ὅσα ἀγνα, ὅσα προσφιλη, ὅσα ευφημα, εἰ τις ἀρετη και εἰ τις ἐπαινος, ταυτα λογιζεσθε.

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

IT is not, I think, a little surprizing to see many Christian divines, of the first learning and abilities, employing that learning and those abilities, and much of their time, in framing laborious systems of ethics from the law of nature, whilst they have the books of the New Testament continually lying open before their eyes. In Plato and Aristotle, in Cicero and Seneca, this was a laudable and useful undertaking; but,

in

in a Christian, it is neither useful or meritorious, nor wiser than if any one should chuse to shut his eyes in the brightest daylight, only to try if he was able to grope out his way in the dark. It is now as impossible for any man to form a religious and moral institution by the mere efforts of human reason, as to see by a farthing candle in the midst of a meridian sunshine. He must unavoidably adopt the doctrines and precepts of the Gospel, and then mistake them for his own. If his own are true and just, they must be exactly the same; and if they differ, they are unworthy of notice. If we believe the doctrine and precepts transmitted to us in the New Testament to be a revelation from God, we cannot, without presumption, search out for any other, nor even accept the same on an inferior authority. Whatever may be their authority, their unrivalled excellence is indisputable. The moral lessons of Christ are all so concise, so clear, so persuasive, so unencumbered with definitions

and inquiries, and enforced by parables so apposite and instructive, as brings them nearer to our hearts, and renders them not only superior to, but unlike all which had ever before been published to the world. In omitting all unnecessary disquisitions on moral and religious subjects, the Apostles imitated the example of their master. In the passage now before us, St. Paul, writing to the brethren at Philippi, enjoins them to think on, that is, not to forget to practise, "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure." He takes it for granted, that those to whom he wrote, as well as all mankind, knew what things are true, honest, just, and pure; and therefore he enters not into any metaphysical inquiries into the abstract nature of truth, honesty, justice, and purity, which are always useless, and sometimes detrimental, as they never induce men to be virtuous, and sometimes serve to furnish them with excuses for vices. Men want not knowledge

ledge of their duty, but inclination to perform it. A definition of virtue will never make any one less profligate, nor an enquiry concerning the origin of property make any one more honest; no more than a dissertation on optics will make a man see, or a receipt for distilling brandy or brewing strong beer will make him sober.

2 THESSALONIANS II. 11.

Και δια τὸτο πεμψει αὐτοῖς ὁ Θεὸς ἐνεργειαν
πλάνης, εἰς τὸ πιστεῦσαι αὐτὰς τῷ ψευδεῖ.

*And for this cause God shall send them strong
delusion, that they should believe a lie.*

IN this, and several other places in both the Old and New Testament, God is represented as leading men into errors destructive to their innocence and happiness, sometimes by his own, and sometimes by the influence of intermediate spirits. How is this reconcileable with his justice and goodness? How can any evil proceed from infinite goodness, or any delusion from the fountain of all truth? No commentator or preacher on these texts, that I know of, has yet been able to answer these questions in a manner satisfactory to reason or common sense.

But this difficulty, like most others in our interpretations of scripture, arises from our

own ignorance and our insensibility of it. We boldly and presumptuously assert, that God cannot do one thing, and that he will not do another, because such things seem to us to be inconsistent with those attributes which we have thought proper to bestow upon him ; but we know so little of the nature of good and evil, of truth or falsehood, of God or man, or of the relations between a Creator and his creatures, that we are utterly incapable to prescribe limits to his power, or rules to his will ; as well might a worm pretend to decide on the councils of princes, and the policies of empires, as man to pass judgment on the dispensations of the Almighty. We say, God cannot be the cause of any evil ; but we know not what is evil ; he may be, and is, the cause of many things which appear, and really are, evils to us, however they may be necessary to the production of universal good. We say, he cannot be the cause of any delusion ; but why not ? truth is by no means the criterion of virtue, as
some

some philosophers would persuade us; delusion, in itself, is neither good or evil; its merit or criminality depends on the end for which it is intended: it is no crime to deceive men for their entertainment, much less for their benefit; there is no immorality in writing a play, a poem, or romance, because it is fiction, but great merit, if it is calculated to promote virtue, or to discourage vice. The whole of this life is a succession of delusions, kindly imposed upon us by our Creator, to enable us to support the sufferings, and carry on the business of it. The fallacy of each we discover in its turn, but never till it has attained its end. It is all mere scenery, a beautiful illusion, in which every object, being placed at a proper distance, and seen through a false medium, appears as it ought, but never as it is. Wealth, honours, and pleasures, are exhibited in the clearest light, to incite our industry; but the vanity of their possessions is hid for a time under a cloud, that we may not sink
 into

into sloth and inactivity. Thus we may be said to believe a lie, that is, what is not true; unexperienced, we believe that the prosperity of this world will make us completely happy, that the period of life is of long duration, and that the hour of death is ever at a great distance; in every one of which we find ourselves constantly deceived; on which beneficent deception all our enjoyments, hopes, expectations, and pursuits intirely depend. If God, therefore, by means of these kind delusions, dispenses undeserved blessings on mankind, why may he not sometimes inflict such punishments upon them, as their offences may have deserved, by the same means, either by his own power, or the operations of intermediate spirits? We know that he has given us power to deceive and ensnare, as well as to destroy, inferior animals; a power which we daily exercise without scruple, without arraigning his justice or our own. Why then may he not, with equal justice, grant the same

same power over us, to beings of superior orders?

We may further add, that there are many passages, in both the Old and New Testament, similar to this before us, which are, in fact, nothing more than modes of expression usually made use of by the writers of those books, who generally impute every event and action, whether good or evil, just or unjust, to God himself, without any reference to second causes. Every disposition of men's hearts, and every act proceeding from them, are ascribed immediately to God; by which nothing more is to be understood, than that such were men's hearts, and such things were done. This, in a large and extensive view, is certainly right, because the great Creator and disposer of all things must primarily be the cause of all dispositions, actions, and events; because the First Cause must be the cause of every cause from whence they can proceed: but how this is consistent with ~~that~~ freewill,

freewill, of which we know and feel we ourselves are possessed, is far above the reach of our imperfect comprehensions; reason assures us that both are true, and scripture every where confirms this conclusion.

JAMES

JAMES IV. I.

Ποθεν πολεμοι και μαχαι εν υμιν; εκ
 ενθεν, εκ των ηδονων υμων των στρατευομενων
 εν τοις μελεσιν υμων;

*From whence come wars and fighting among
 you? come they not hence, even of your lusts?*

AS war and peace so essentially affect the morals, as well as the happiness of mankind, it seems extraordinary that the great Author of the Christian religion should have given no directions on so important a subject. The Apostle here decides nothing concerning the lawfulness of wars amongst Christians, but only informs us from whence they proceed, which is from their ungoverned passions, anger and revenge, avarice and ambition; nor do we find, in any part of the New Testament, that they are either absolutely allowed or positively forbid. This remarkable silence, I think, is not difficult to be accounted for; because,
 if

if Christ had encouraged, or even expressly permitted, his disciples to carry on wars and fightings, he would have given the sanction of divine authority to all the wickedness and misery, which inevitably attend them; and if he had absolutely forbid them to fight on any occasion, he must have left every country, in which his religion should prevail, a defenceless prey to every infidel invader; he prudently, therefore, rather chose to leave their defence to the operations of their own passions and vices, which he knew, notwithstanding all his pacific precepts, would always be sufficient for that purpose.—But although in this, as well as in many other instances, Providence employs the iniquities of men to bring about beneficial ends, this lessens not their criminality, or justifies those who commit them. All the precepts of Christ, and every principle of the religion which he taught, are diametrically opposite to those of war: these require a poor, meek, and humble spirit; which those represent as infamous

and contemptible: these exhort us to live peaceably with all men; which is certainly incompatible with a state of war: these recommend patience and forbearance under the greatest insults; those the quickest and most violent resentment: these enjoin us to love and serve our enemies; those to destroy them with fire and sword. How at the same time we can serve these two masters, or how their commands can be made consistent with each other, I must leave to some pious and valiant Christian hero to explain.

F I N I S.



